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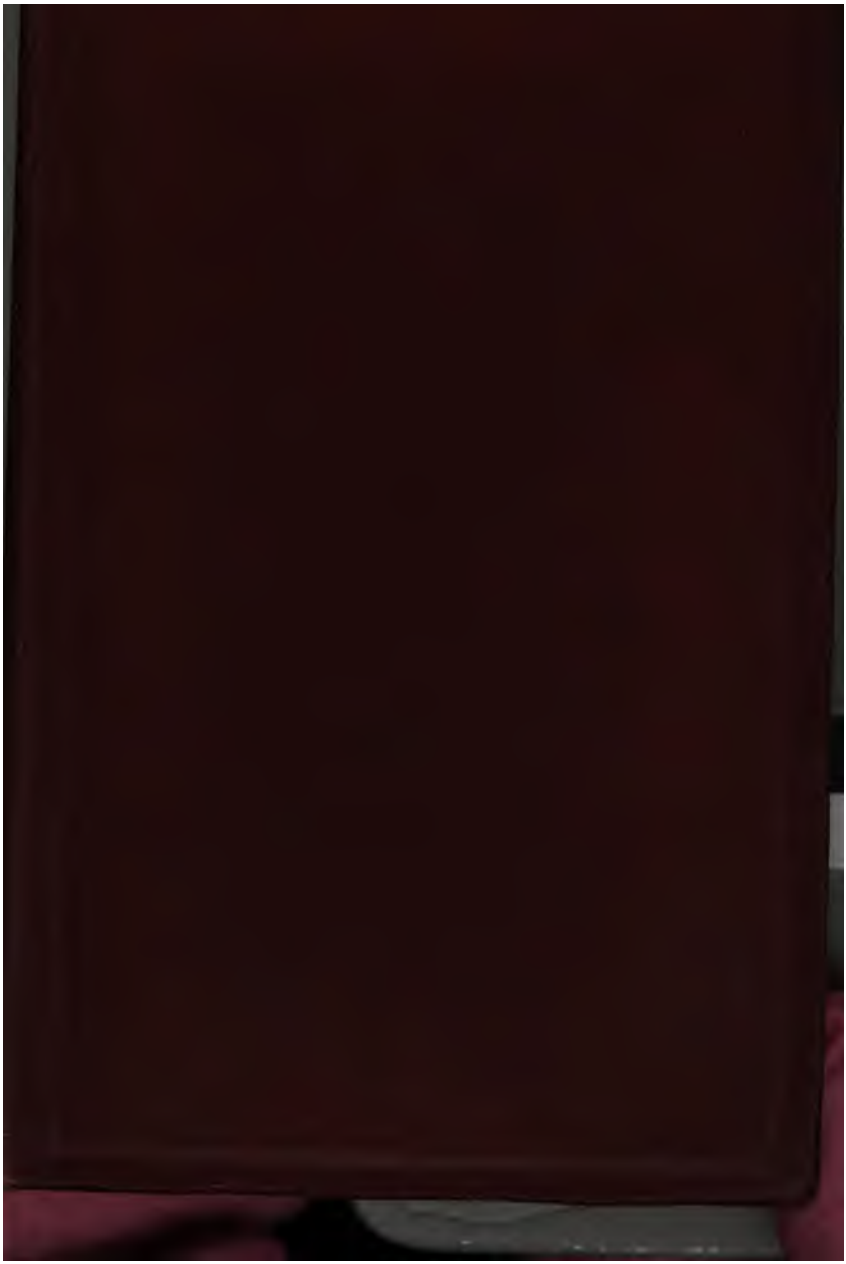

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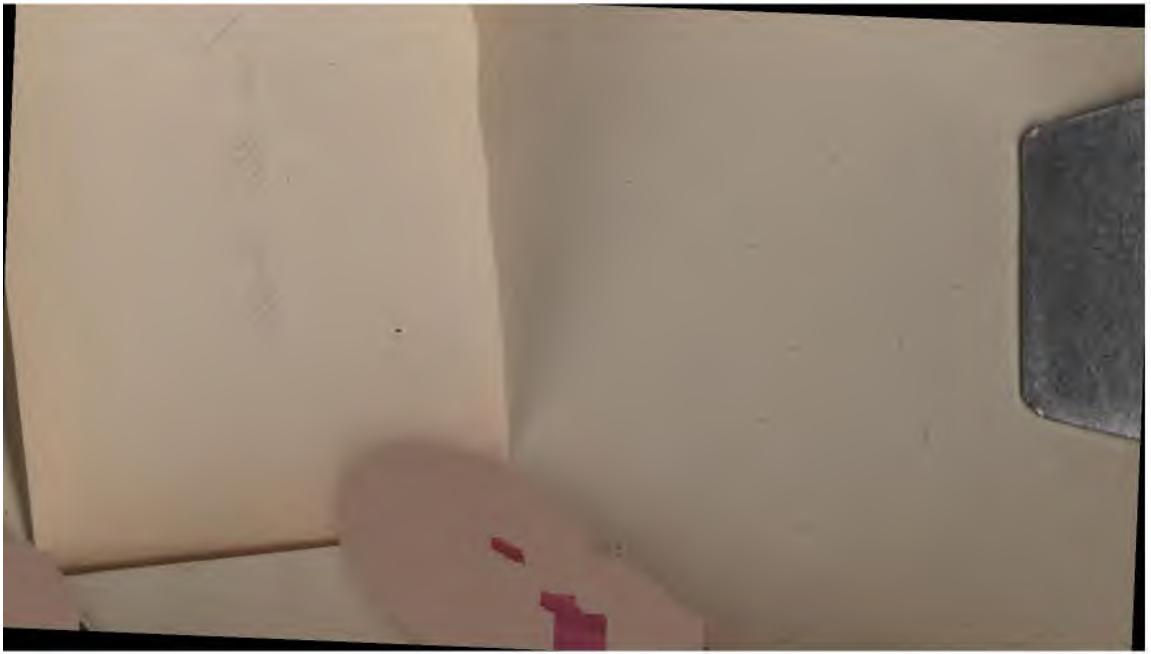
POEMS OF LATER YEARS.



POEMS OF LATER YEARS.

LONDON: PRINTED BY
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THE CHANTRY OWL

AND OTHER VERSES

BEING A REVISED EDITION OF

'POEMS OF LATER YEARS'

BY

HENRY SEWELL STOKES

WITH ADDITIONS

LONDON
LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.
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From the Author.

POEMS OF LATER YEARS.

Our worth the Grecian sages knew;
They gave our sires the honour due;
They weigh'd the dignity of fowls,
And pried into the depth of owls.

GAY.

Good night, my good owl.

LOVE'S LABOUR LOST.

THE CHANTRY OWL.

PART I.

I

As slow the curfew knell'd the hour,
When Night had spread her sable pall,
The ghostly Owl came from the tower
And rested on the Chantry wall:
But long before that pile stood there
He left his shell, as greybeards swear;
As solemn look'd and whoop'd as loud
Ere the last Prior was in his shroud.

II

Who doubts my verse his lamp may trim,
And read in Humboldt's serious prose
Of the grey parrot seen by him
Where the grand Orinoco flows:
Motionless as sepulchral stone,
And mute till in a tongue unknown
It plain'd the brave Aturian race
Of whom no man could vestige trace.

III

'Tu-whit! Tu-whoo!' the Owl began,
And then his sounds took shape in words,
And like a reasonable man
He talk'd, as did the clever birds
In Chaucer's sylvan Parliament,
The day when Valentines were sent;
Or those who taught in Æsop's time,
Or still instruct us in Gay's rhyme.

IV

'Tu-whit! Tu-whoo!' the solemn Owl,
Preferring poesy to prose,
As is the case with every fowl
That speaks and the distinction knows,
In smooth octo-syllabic verse
To me his story did rehearse
Repeating over and again
'Tu-whit! Tu-whoo!' as his refrain.

V

'Tu-whit! Tu-whoo! Bluff Hal was King,
And Wolsey was the Chancellor,
And merrily the bells did ring,
And Monks grew fatter by the score;
Their faces were as platters round,
Their lungs were as smith's bellows sound,
Whether they caroll'd in the Church,
Or did the woods for venison search.

VI

'Some few were pale and learnèd men,
Some gentle, loved by rich and poor,
Some frowsy as a clucking hen,
Some hard and lean as scullion's skewer;
But like a turkeycock the Prior
Wabbled and puff'd from cell to quire,
Yet both could give and take a joke,
And when he laugh'd look'd like to choke.

VII

'Tu-whit! Tu-whoo! The horse he rode
Was a sleek, punchy, patient hack,
Whereon he sat much like a load
Of wool stuff'd into a large pack;
Bobbing and blessing as he went,
While folk their knees before him bent;
Good-natured as most fat men are,
But not disposed to travel far.

VIII

'The Sacristan could lift the can,
Tu-whit! Tu-whoo! his nose was blue,
His girth no hogshead's hoop could span,
And, when a kirtle came in view
With neat-laced shoon and fine-spun hose,
And a cheek redder than a rose,
Loud as the thrush that sings on tree
Would ring his Benedicite!

IX

'Tu-whit! that with and without cowls
Men are alike I long suspected,
And much less strict than doves and owls,
Who peck'd to death are when detected.
Tu-whoo! One Shrovetide on the Rood
Musing I sat in solemn mood,
When near the tower there was a noise
Like chuckling—not from censer-boys.

X

'Just then I heard and perhaps mistook
For that the voices of two cats,
Close where the rain runs like a brook
Down to the gargoyles from the flats:
What more befell I cannot tell,
For at that moment chimed the bell
Which summon'd all the monks to pray,
And warn'd me there no more to stay.

XI

'Ha! when the chimes for service rang,
Early or late, how good all look'd!
Like saints they in the chancel sang,
Though some through noses wide or crook'd:
And then to see them when they knelt,
They look'd as if death's grip they felt;
So soft their penitential tones,
They might have moved the very stones.

XII

'You may believe me when I say
To every nook and aperture
Of that vast pile I knew my way,
The Convent mason not more sure:
No light, no ladder I required,
Came when I pleased and so retired,
Unheard, unseen, and always knew
When safe to cry, Tu-whit! Tu-whoo!

XIII

'So to the belfry I went up
That night, but not to view the stars,
Or to my distant mate to whoop,
But to peep through the louvre-bars;
Perhaps to watch those heathen cats
I heard just now upon the flats,
Whose accents I must frankly own
Had such a very human tone.

XIV

'How angry at their blasphemy
I felt, I leave you to suppose,
And what my wrath was then to see,
Not two of my insidious foes,
But there they were in hideous groups,
Retreating some like beaten troops,
Then rushing back to the mêlée,
Black, yellow, brindled, white, and grey.

XV

'The organ peal'd below, but soon
The din above the anthem drown'd;
At intervals I heard the tune
The Monks were singing—a sweet sound,
Which only roused the cats again,
As music does on battle-plain;
And then again to fight they fell,
And scream'd and swore like imps of Hell.

XVI

'From nunnery, hamlet, grange, and cot
The cats for leagues rush'd to the fray;
But their fierce tempers were so hot,
To climb the roof they did not stay,
But in the churchyard fought together,
And nicely tann'd their close-furr'd leather,
Making their boiling life-blood fly,
Till purple pools did round them lie.

XVII

'If owls could laugh, I should have laugh'd
To see them by the tombstones dodge,
And practise all their feline craft;
Then in the flesh their sharp teeth lodge,
And plunge their claws like reapers' hooks;
Of mice and frogs some ancient books
Describe the combats, but such war
As this was never seen before.

XVIII

'Within the solemn service ceased,
And forth came Prior and Monks in order;
But the cats' fury still increased,
And other cats still cross'd the border;
Some that in ambush lay conceal'd
Leap'd forth like tigers to the field;
Some from the roofs brought down the slates,
And some fell on the shining pates.

XIX

'And then I heard the bloodhounds bay,
Which the Monks in their kennel kept;
On—on they came—away, away
Scatter'd and fast, the cats all swept,
Like leaves before the autumn wind,
And left not one dead cat behind:
By men I've often seen men slain,
But cats from killing cats refrain.'

XX

And here the Owl, whose voice was hoarse,
Yet seem'd an echo of my own,
Abruptly closed that night's discourse,
But why to me was never known.
He something saw I could not see,
He something heard unheard by me,
And, while I waited in the gloom,
His silent wings sail'd down the coomb.

PART II.

I

On the next night, at the same hour,
Upon the stile I took my seat,
And with a nod from his lone bower
The Owl did my obeisance greet.
'Tu-whit!' cried he, the very words
Which lawyers use as well as birds,
But with a meaning not so clear,
And not so pleasing to the ear.

II

'Tu-whoo!' I courteously replied,
And did to him my service tender,
And would have doff'd my beaver wide
Had he been of another gender.
We prosed on common things—the weather,
Which had not ruffled the least feather;
Ask'd for each other's families,
With other like amenities.

III

And then I begg'd he would proceed
With his historic recollections,
Supplying, when he thought was need,
Light episodes or grave reflections.
'Tu-whit! Tu-whoo!'—he clear'd his throat,
As orators of greater note,
And then in fluent phrase began,
And thus his speech in numbers ran:—

IV

'Perch'd near the porch one winter-night,
From a snug niche I heard the chant,
While in the candle's misty light
Each burly Monk look'd pale and gaunt.
I thought they wish'd themselves not there,
So fast they got through psalm and prayer;
And, when they hasten'd to retire,
A young lad darted from the quire.

V

'With twinkling eyes and taper dim
The shrine where I was perch'd he reach'd,
When I flew out right over him,
And like a scalded hound he screech'd:
The Monks rush'd out with a wild shout,
And the last had the Sacrist's snout,
Like Jack-o'-lantern in a bog,
Or a torch flaring in a fog.

VI

'A fiend! cried some,—a ghost! cried more,
As they push'd and crush'd and tumbled forth;
But some stuck fast in the narrow door;
And not a few then proved the worth
Of stalwart arms and sturdy shanks,
And cuff'd and kick'd and had rough thanks;
And, when at last they all got clear,
Like squattering ducks they quaked with fear.

VII

'I saw a greater rout than that
When Hal became Old England's Pope,
While on his knee fair Boleyn sat,
And did with Rome's best scholars cope.
He hesitated at the first,
But her sweet lips his doubts dispersed;
And so he changed his faith and wife,
And led some time a merry life.

VIII

'The Pope call'd Hal a heretic,
And his young sweetheart something worse;
Indeed, had she espoused Old Nick,
He could not more devoutly curse.
For her, alas! the curse came true;
Jealous the savage Redbeard grew;
Anna's white neck was chopp'd like chaff,
And Hal with another wife did laugh.

IX

'But to my story. On a day
I heard the jeering rabble tell
Strangers had come, but not to pray,
And who would no indulgence sell:
But when the chimes for vespers rang,
Amid the trumpets' horrid clang
Came forth the Prior and Monks once more
And sang more sweetly than before.

X

'I never heard them sing again!
Next morning on the Convent wall
I watch'd and waited, but in vain,
The chimes did not for matins call:
Later, when loud the hubbub grew,
They shambled out—Tu-whit! Tu-whoo!
Bleating like sheep that leave the fold
To wander on the mountains cold.

XI

'Tu-whit! Tu-whoo! Tu-whit! Tu-whoo!
Next night I visited the place,
Along the galleries I flew
From cell to cell, but met no face;
The white Moon through the mullions stream'd,
In the great hall the logs still gleam'd,
But no one by the hearth was sitting,
And bats from arch to arch were flitting.

XII

'Then to the dairy, a sweet spot,
So clean the shelves, so cool the shade;
It might have been a hermit's grot,
For there a crystal fountain play'd.
Into the cellar last I dived,
Grandly for holding casks contrived,
Big vats for ale that was not swipes,
For choicer liquids tuns and pipes.

XIII

'I perch'd upon a wide-girth'd vat,
Full to the top with stout October;
The very sight would make you fat,
The smell would hardly leave you sober.
It fizz'd and rumbled so within,
My head began to swim and spin;
So potent was its latent strength,
I measured soon my breadth and length.

XIV

'Flip-flap I ficunder'd on the floor,
But in my swound I still could hear
That awful vat's continuous roar,
And fancied I was drown'd in beer;
Then seem'd to whirl like a dead pup
In a mill-stream when the hatch is up;
Then bump'd until my bones were crack'd,
And then swept down a cataract.

XV

'At last, as in my swound I lay,
I thought the beer had all run off,
And through the gargoyles found its way
To kennel, poultry-yard, and trough;
That cocks and hens, and hounds and hogs
Had all got drunk, and drunk the frogs;
And that the rats from their deep holes
Were floating up in tipsy shoals.

XVI

'Twas but the fumes that fuddled me,
And, as I from the fit recover'd,
I reel'd to the Refectory,
And round the hearth's warm embers hover'd.
Tu-whit! Tu-whoo! I scarce could cry,
My wings I tried but could not fly,
Then in the Prior's broad-bottom'd chair
I sank, and for some hours slept there.

XVII

'As back my senses slowly came,
Thought I that malt's a dangerous drug;
It prompts to crime and brings to shame
All who are given to lift the mug,
The miller and the Monk alike,
Who handles scythe, or carries pike:
I've seen some learnèd clerks turn fools
When the stuff got into their skulls.

XVIII

'How blest are they who dwell in trees,
And get their beverage from the rills,
Cool, clear, and fresh as morning's breeze,
Brought from the fountains in the hills!
The kine desire no other drink,
The prancing horses love the brink
Where lilies deck the lake's smooth marge,
And the swan guides her downy charge.

XIX

'Tu-whit! Tu-whoo! It has been said
Misfortunes never come alone;
Proved by the scars upon my head,
Where never since have feathers grown.
While roosting by the hearth's warm gleam
I did of happier moments dream,
Forgetting owls to pain are born,
My scalp was by sharp talons torn.

XX

'Tu-whit! Tu-whoo! I gave a shriek,
And did in turn the imp assail;
He fled—but with my strong hard beak
I caught him—caught him by the tail,
And held him tight as in a vice,
Proving that owls catch more than mice;
And with my bill so close did cleave,
That he with me his tail did leave.

XXI

'And then I claw'd him—tit for tat,
And fast let out his blood and gravy,
Until the sly old Convent cat
Gave in, and meekly mew'd, peccavi;
Said he mistook me for brown Tom
Who did last night his whiskers comb;
And hoped I would compassion take
On him for old acquaintance sake.

XXII

'My bowels yearn'd to my old friend,
And I relax'd my beak and claws;
But hoped he would his morals mend,
And be less handy with his paws;
And, if he still would caterwaul,
Advised him to avoid that hall.
Grimalkin wink'd—"All right," said he,
"Let's go into the buttery."

XXIII

'So thither we forthwith adjourn'd,
And found some cheer in that lone place;
If into curds the custards turn'd,
The cheeses would no board disgrace;
And by the glimmer of the stars
That reach'd us through the iron bars,
We saw the bread, if stale, was white,
And rarer dainties came in sight.

XXIV

'Oil-flasks by dozens you could count,
And bacon-flitches by the score;
The hams would to some hundreds mount,
Of brawn there was no end of store:
The view from butter-firkins changed
To pork-tubs, all in order ranged;
Barrels of peas and sacks of flour
Were left for vermin to devour.

XXV

'It was a grand yet mournful scene,
And moisten'd while it charm'd the eye,
Thinking of those who thence had been
Turn'd out like pigs condemn'd to die.
It made me feel, believe my word,
A sadder and a wiser bird;
And so perhaps my comrade felt,
Though cats are not much given to melt.

XXVI

'But all must feed as well as feel,
And so to supper we both went,
Tasting of most things in our meal,
Nor pausing till some hours were spent.
But, while I did the chestnuts nip,
My tailless friend gave me the slip,
And six months after he was found
In a tall cask of Malmsey drown'd.

XXVII

'Tu-whit! Tu-whoo! I tried my wings,
And found that I once more could fly;
And blithe as lark that soars and sings
I flew and twirl'd about the sky;
Till, tired, once more upon my perch
On the high Rood of the old Church
I rested, but no bell was rung,
No Mass was said, no psalm was sung.'

XXVIII

Having thus spoke, the pensive Owl
Said, as he gave a parting nod,
That, if the weather was not foul
To-morrow, and I came that road,
He would his narrative resume:
With thanks, I promised I would come.
'Tu-whit! Tu-whoo!' to my farewell
He cried, and vanish'd in the dell.

PART III.

I

Thought I, as I my way pursued,
Had that wise biped been at College,
He might have coped with Hume or Froude
In rhetoric as well as knowledge.
Were he a little more evolved,
He would have gravest problems solved,
Might have Colenso's rival been,
As Mill profound, as Fawcett keen.

II

The Owl was Wisdom's bird we read
In those far-distant classic ages;
And looks and is as wise indeed
As some we now regard as sages:
That bird perhaps has mused upon
The cornice of the Parthenon,
Has archæologised in Rome,
And yet may scale Saint Peter's dome.

III

He likes a barn and buttery much,
But hoary ruins he prefers,
Places where Time has left his touch,
Spots undisturb'd by travellers;
Dismantled keeps, deserted halls,
Unpeopled towns, with roofless walls:
There on the past he loves to muse,
And cares not for the daily news.

IV

Birds with his tastes will never want
Fit mansions for their solitude;
Each day they find some other haunt,
Fresh scenes with shatter'd buildings strew'd:
For Time is ever at his trade,
But using neither pick nor spade,
Sapping and delving, slow and sure,
No fortress can his siege endure.

V

And, if the soul still transmigrates,
Volney may be an owl to-night,
That at Palmyra meditates,
Or thence to Balbec takes its flight:
Layard perchance some day may be
A bittern by lone Nineveh,
And Palgrave in his plumy dress
A pelican of the wilderness.

VI

On Karnak's starlit propylæum
Denon may as an ibis sit;
In the dim Flavian Coliseum
Gibbon may with a bat's wing flit;
And ages hence, when at Saint Paul's
The dome into the transept falls,
Macaulay as a feather'd spirit
May that stupendous pile inherit.

VII

Livy and Poggius in like shape
Perch on the dark Capitoline,
While neatherds in the Forum gape,
And sheepdogs range the Palatine.
Virgil to Pæstum's solitude
Flies as a dove by kites pursued,
But Horace snug in Naples' bowers
Roosts till the Dawn leads on the Hours.

VIII

Milton on wings, on golden wings,
Will from the region of the skies
Revisit Salem's hallow'd springs,
And the lost bowers of Paradise:
Not at this hour, but when the beam
Flashes o'er mountain, dale, and stream,
And lovely looks the changeful Earth
As on the morning of her birth.

IX

Voltaire from Ferney's woods has flown
To see the Tuileries smouldering still,
While Rousseau with a ringdove's moan
Pines in the shades of Ermenonville.
Lamartine in Sedan's dark vale
Is now a lonely nightingale;
And will prolong his strain of sorrow
Till the light brings a happier morrow.

X

Around Granada's vacant halls
Irving may in the twilight skim,
And Wordsworth fly to Tintern's walls
When their pale lamps the glow-worms trim.
And Hugo in a sea-bird's form
Years hence may combat with the storm,
Wail o'er the 'Toiler's' ocean grave,
And flout the monster in his cave.

XI

He who his lady's mole preferr'd
To all the gems of Samarcand,
And all Bokhara's gold, is heard
Still in the bulbul of his land.
Moore, Erin's Hafiz, yet of love
And Erin trills in Bowood's grove,
And in the gardens of Cashmere
Warbles when England's leaves are sere.

XII

While hawthorn-buds in Arden blow,
And hearts can be by love beguiled,
Till dews and tears no longer flow,
Shakespeare will sing his 'wood-notes wild.'
Scott in Melrose awaits the Moon;
Burns haunts the banks of bonnie Doon,
Save when bewitch'd at midnight dark
He claps his wings at Cutty-sark.

XIII

Rabelais and Swift as birds obscene
May in some dark cloaca waddle,
Churchill his plumes in Fleet-ditch preen,
And Wolcot in a duck-pond paddle.
Fielding and Smollett, handsome birds,
As magpies pick up some bad words;
And yet we trust they ne'er will be
Hang'd on the barn-door's gallows-tree.

XIV

Coleridge is now an albatross,
But fears no ancient mariner,
And those who Southern oceans cross
Will hail the trustful harbinger.
'He prayeth best who loveth best,'
Such was the faith which he profess'd,
And while the world shall roll its round
Will that divinity prove sound.

XV

Keats, watching on Saint Agnes' Eve,
'For all his feathers is a-cold,'
Where once he heard the beadsman grieve,
Whose fingers numb the rosary told:
The music and the choral song
Still sound, and still a gorgeous throng
Sweeps by where youthful Madeline
Stood with her downcast eyes divine.

XVI

And when the Minster's glorious light
With wreaths the Laureate's tomb shall cover,
His fancy in a falcon's flight
Around Tintagel's cliff will hover;
While Hawker as a petrel dips
And warns of storms the homebound ships,
Or cleaves the wave beneath whose roll
The long-lost bells of Bottreau toll.

XVII

Shelley a lark at Heav'n's gate sings,
Poe as a raven flaps the cloud,
And Campbell on a seamew's wings
Wheels o'er the Baltic's foaming flood.
Byron, a wild swan, strong and free,
Stretches into the Ancient Sea,
And where the Isles like emeralds glow
In the blue Archipelago.

XVIII.

Napoleon crests the Alps once more,
Then, darkening space, his pinions sweep
O'er Etna down the Afric shore
To his lone eyry on the Deep.
As kestrels some from regal towers
Will against small birds try their powers;
The heroes who at pigeons pop
May soon themselves as titlarks drop.

XIX

I have it now—the thick scales fall
Which so bewilder'd my short sight;
That Owl was not a bird at all,
Not a mere prowler of the night,
With downy wings and optics keen
Fitted to prey on creatures mean—
But, if I do not give offence,
A full-fledged, rare intelligence.

XX

The souls of chroniclers and bards,
Like Walsingham and Walter Mapes,
May hum and buzz in beetles' shards,
Permitted to assume the shapes
Suited to their 'proclivities,'
And free to change them when they please;
Or metamorphosed 'gainst their will,
Yet as themselves remaining still.

XXI

Some are condemn'd to grosser forms,
To wallow as Circean swine,
To grunt as Borgian boars, as worms
On carrion—p'rhaps their own—to dine.
And the reverse I sometimes see,
Confirming Darwin's theory;
The Old World monkeys live again,
And snakes and wolves appear as men.

XXII

At times the types show strangely mix'd—
Crosses of man, fish, bird and beast;
Sharks' maws with gouty limbs affix'd,
As may be seen at civic feast;
Priests who can't hide the cloven foot;
A goat's hoof cover'd by a boot;
Lawyers with foxes' heads—and tails?
Fingers with claws instead of nails.

XXIII

The subtle razor or sharp shears
Must mow the badger-bristles' growth;
High hats are worn to hide long ears,
A beard conceals a canine mouth:
There's scarce an article of dress
But serves to veil some ugliness,
While for the fairest since Eve sinn'd
Birds have been pluck'd and mammals skinn'

XXIV

This proves our consanguinity,
Although the mode is somewhat cruel;
And, should it moisten woman's eye,
The tear would be her brightest jewel.
But, while the drops of pity fall,
Fashion rules heartless over all;
Yet the white hand whose kerchief wipes
Those tears away recalls old types.

XXV

Yes, our affinities should teach
Compassion to all forms of life;
Not best do they our duty preach
Who warn us only against strife:
The law of love is Heaven's own law,
And Heaven will no distinctions draw;
The meanest thing has God's regard,
And mercy brings Divine reward.

XXVI

If we must kill to live is sad,
Then what is slaughter for mere sport?
God tries to make his creatures glad,
But joy is fleet and life is short.
Cavalry charging hares seem crazed,
The fox looks at the field amazed,
And thinks men, hounds, and horses fools,
And in the stream their ardour cools.

XXVII

What shall we say to the battue,
Birds bred to be in hundreds slain?
For blood a mimic Waterloo,
Save that the killers safe remain.
The brilliant eyes, the lovely plumes,
Who heeds them till the flask consumes?
Those the gun wings are quickly scragg'd,
When the shot's spent no more are bagg'd.

XXVIII

Were game extinct they'd shoot the fowls,
The ducks, the geese, and clear the styes;
They would preserve the crows and owls,
And have battues of butterflies.
Killing's the Englishman's delight,
He's at it morning, noon, and night;
A butcher born, yet owns the creed
That God of sparrows taketh heed.

XXIX

Enough of science and its guesses,
And of that myth, metempsychosis,
A faith which, if none here professes,
Prevail'd before the time of Moses;
Believed in by Pythagoras,
Not yet translated to an ass;
Which millions still as truth receive;
But to the 'Chips' that theme I leave.

XXX

Enough of such odd whims. The mist
Was spreading mythlike through the vale,
The silent woods were dark and trist,
And o'er the hill the Moon rose pale:
The rooks were in the elm trees housed,
The ploughboys on their pallets drowsed;
I met no creature on my road
Save droning beetle and squat toad.

PART IV.

I

I slept—I woke; but all that night
And all next day 'twas awful weather;
The rooks from all the trees took flight,
And gulls far inland flew together:
Chimneys were scatter'd through the town,
Slates, tiles, bricks cover'd all the down,
And the old Church without its spire
Would not be known by Monk or Prior.

II

Towards night the tempest did abate,
Stars peep'd between the broken clouds,
The gulls had reach'd the cliffs, and late
The rooks came to their trees in crowds:
Yet loud and swift the river rush'd,
All else—woods, hamlets, folds—were hu
As to the stile I took my way
To hear what more my friend would say.

III

I greatly long'd to glean from him
Some notes on later history,
Of Mary and her beadsman grim,
And of the Vestal 'fancy free:'
Had he seen Papists drawn and quarter'd,
And stiff-neck'd Nonconformists martyr'd;
And how about the outcast poor
Since closed 'gainst them the Convent door?

IV

Fear'd he the swearing Cavaliers
More than the Roundheads praying strong?
Which was least grating to his ears,
A nasal hymn or a ribald song?
How felt he as the horses neigh'd,
When nave and quire were stables made?
Would he rather hear tall Barebones rant,
Than Hopkins drawl or Sternhold chant?

V

But most I wish'd to learn his views
On Pio Nono's grand Armada,
When, as if we were Moors or Jews,
To be stamp'd out as in Granada,
He sent—array'd with crucifix,
Pyx, pictures, crosiers, candlesticks—
Priests, monks, nuns, bishops, and Rome's lingo,
And a Cardinal red as a flamingo.

VI

Perhaps, from old associations,
He felt towards the intruders kind,
And since some recent imitations
Was glad the real thing to find.
But here the daws and rooks awoke,
Geese cackled, and the frogs did croak,
And I my queries did suspend,
Until I saw my sapient friend.

VII

And yet my noddle still was full
Of maggots as a cheese o'er-ripe:
The bony cave we call a skull,
Caucasian or whatever type,
Can in its secret cells compress
Things small and great and numberless;
Though shopboys' fingers measure it,
And 'six-three-eighths' will most heads fit.

VIII

'Seven-and-a-third' we might allow
For Shakespeare, judging by the bust;
The same for Verulam's grand brow,
If in the portraits we may trust.
Of Byron's, Shelley's brains compact
Hunt gave the measurements exact;
Some scores of shakos large were found
For those fine craniums, chaplet-crown'd.

IX

But now the silent place I reach'd,
Where skulls are cover'd by the sod,
And saw the pile where lately preach'd
The wise Owl from the ivy-tod:
The chantry wall was left quite bare,
And birds no more would nestle there;
And ugly gaps were in the roof,
That had for ages been storm-proof.

X

'Tu-whit!' I shouted loud and long,
And Echo seem'd to sigh 'Tu-whoo!'
I search'd within, without, among
The mounds and tombstones wet with dew;
Then in the Church, which in like plight
Was left by the tempestuous night;
And cried 'Tu-whit!' from the grey tower
Till the bell toll'd the midnight hour.

XI

Then where the Priory once had stood,
Then where the barn was standing still,
Then down the dell, and through the wood
Whose leafy mantle wraps the hill,
'Tu-whit! Tu-whoo! Tu-whit!' I cried,
But only Echo still replied;
And then I came up by the coomb,
But no wing met me in the gloom.

XII

And last the lonesome hill I climb'd
To the dark tower without its church,
Where bells have not for ages chimed,
And daws as long have made their perch.
The ivy rustled in the wind,
I call'd, but did no answer find,
Then left that chilly place forlorn,
And the dead none remain'd to mourn.

XIII

As still as those forgotten dead,
Below the long dark town was lying;
Though some might wake, and on the bed
Of anguish others might be dying.
An infant's cry I thought I heard,
And then the flutter of a bird;
'Tu-whit!' once more I call'd—'Tu-whoo!'
And from me fast a small wing flew.

XIV

I groped back by the Chantry wall
Where nodded o'er the dead the trees
Like plumes at some grand funeral,
While mists renew'd the obsequies,
And slow like white-robed priests swept past,
But mute as Death, and I came last.
Full forty thousand there did sleep,
Apart the felons—a huge heap.

XV

Where was the Owl? In last night's storm
Had he been struck down by the blast,
Or by the lightning's livid form
From splinter'd rock or bough been cast?
Had he been lost in some black cave,
Or had he met a watery grave;
Or in some ruin's hallow'd ground—
His favourite haunt—his burial found?

XVI

Left he a mate to grieve for him,
And owlets looking for his care,
For whom when stars were burning dim
He travell'd miles to fetch their fare ?
He kill'd field-mice and rats, 'tis true,
But not for killing's sake he slew,
Not, as I've said, for sport men slay,
But as the lion stalks for prey.

XVII

May-be he had nor mate nor brood,
And last survived his feather'd kin,
And had not far to seek for food,
And only his own bread to win :
Like that Aturian parrot old
Of whom the German traveller told,
Left in primeval forests lone,
Who talk'd but in a tongue unknown.

XVIII

Tu-whit! Tu-whoo! to me that sound
Speaks as the voice of Melancholy;
Yet, when the board with cups is crown'd,
'Tis turn'd into the song of Folly:
Tu-whit! Tu-whoo! in the hot bowl
The screaming tipplers drown 'the Owl!'
But my bird had a happier doom,
And rests in a more decent tomb.

XIX

I felt as if I'd lost a friend,
And loss of some would less deplore;
But owls like men must have an end,
Though when—ay when, we know no more
Than owls or any living thing;
Death hovers on a noiseless wing,
Now swift, now slow his unseen flight,
And pounces both by day and night.

XX

Then sad and cold, to sleep or yawn,
I saunter'd home, and slept and dreamt,
Till through the casement broke the dawn,
And like a colt with mane unkempt
I rose and shook my locks and brain;
And, when my wits got right again,
Found I'd been dreaming all the time
It took to frame this rambling rhyme.

THE CITY.

High towers, fair temples, goodly theatres,
Strong walls, rich porches, princely palaces,
Large streets, brave houses, sacred sepulchres,
Sure gates, sweet gardens, stately galleries,
Wrought with fair pillars and fine imageries.

SPENSER.

The city swarms intense. The public haunt,
Full of each theme, and warm with mix'd discourse,
Hums indistinct.

THOMSON.

Quacunque libido est,
Incedo solus: percontor quanti olus ac far:
Fallacem Circum vespertinumque pererro,
Saepe Forum.

HOR. *Sat.* vi.

THE CITY.

I

I PACED these streets full fifty years ago,
Which seem'd to me almost as crowded then ;
But of that moving multitude of men
How few are left—not one I used to know !
The tide of life did like that river flow,
So has flow'd since, and will flow on as fast
When all this rush of fever'd souls has pass'd.
As forests fall will larger forests grow :
But now I wade breast-high through drifted leaves,
And all the level of the league-wide plain
Is raised by human mould, and it upheaves
In pyramids of bones to sink again.
With heavy sighs and shuddering steps I tread,
While feet unnumber'd trample countless dead.

II

And when I think of all who in these walls
During those fifty years have lived and dwelt,
Whose names but on their tombs may now be spelt,
A deeper gloom upon my spirit falls,
As fancy, help'd by memory, recalls
Their toil, their cares, their pleasures fleet and vain
The wealth heap'd up for others to retain,
The luxury thousands squander'd in their halls,
The misery millions in foul homes endured,
The wrongs which laws were powerless to prevent,
The sin and shame from which no creed secured,
The days, months, years on beds of anguish spent,
And death which came to all,—I feel forlorn,
And grieve for millions to like troubles born.

III

But here unmanly sounds that natural moan
The living waves that lift me like the surge
Of the broad sea my flagging forces urge,
And this grand roar has much of Ocean's tone.
I cannot stand aloof, or muse alone,
But onward—onward with the flood I sweep,
And even feel I can my footing keep,
Though some more strong beneath the whirl are thrown.
If pleasure looks like toil, toil looks like pleasure;
All seem in earnest, laggards may not rest;
Those who must think for thinking have small leisure;
Brains clash with brains, and breast encounters breast;
Words flash on wires from regions far apart,
And here throbs like an engine the World's heart.

IV

Centre of Science, Commerce, Wealth and Power,
Great Home of Charity, vast Haunt of Crime,
Where from a thousand pinnacles sublime
The ringing changes warn from hour to hour
Of time—sleep—death, like trumpets from Heav'n tower!
Will the day come when all these sounds shall ceas
And in thy streets shall reign sepulchral peace,
Leafless thy parks, thy squares without a flower,
And by the roofless Minster's rifled tombs
Thames flowing silent as by Thebes the Nile,
Or as the Tigris round the mountain-pile
Of Nimroud, whence the traveller exhumes
Shapes that astound our Lilliputian eyes?
Will our Birs-Magog thus Earth's future dwai surprise?

V

ondon! thou more than Tyre a thousand-fold,
/ho will take up the burden against thee?
/ilt thou too fall, Queen City of the Sea?
/ill all the bullion thy vast coffers hold
nder the Northern waves one day be roll'd,
nd from thee stand far off the merchant ships
s from that city in the Apocalypse?
rt thou the mighty city there foretold?
ut what say these, so busy yet so proud,
/ith the hard features of Ezekiel's race,
/ho, like their fathers in the Tyrian crowd,
lingle yet mix not, while their elders pace
ack-streets with frowsy bags and guttural cry?
o they of worn-out England prophesy?

VI

And what thinks Carlyle of this Ocean Babel ?
His pamphlets on the latter days were fierce,
His strokes through sevenfold shields of shams did pierce,
And made some tough hides feel uncomfortable;
Yet for stout work this people still looks able,
And theirs the largest workshop in the world.
Not few the banners from the walls unfurl'd,
But Trade has trophies not less honourable;
More precious than the spoils of War the store
In these high ware-rooms, and more grand the sound
Of this great turmoil than the cannon's roar,
Than whizzing shells the train deep underground,
Or flying through the air o'er spire and mast,
Than battle-cloud the smoke from stacks and funnels cast.

VII

Now men in groups from other climes I meet,
Exiles from many lands with dark, sad eyes,
And as they pass I think I hear their sighs,
And look to see their hot tears at my feet,
As they recall old memories dear and sweet.
Hither at times like wandering swarms they come,
Soon lost their murmurs in this hive's loud hum,
And many to death's silent cells retreat;
But in these walls or their engirdling woods
Others abide, and mourn, and hope, and dream,
Securer than in desert solitudes,
Disturb'd but by the engine's harmless scream.
Petrolean and Utopian find a nest,
A discrown'd Emperor here his aching head may rest.

VIII

That's kind—'tis noble; and across the waves
Threaten who will, none ventures through the swell
To storm this unarm'd, moatless citadel,
Which bravely shelters each who refuge craves.
It proves this place still worthy 'mong its graves
To hold the dust of him whose eloquence
Here fulmined once in Liberty's defence;
The Liberty which crushes not but saves
All that is lofty, gentle, good and just,
Which tramples not upon the meanest worm,
Nor would the spear at blatant Ignorance thrust,
But rests in God and truth serene and firm.
If England owns him first of bards and men,
London calls Milton her chief citizen.

IX

But others in this mingled host I see
From yet remoter regions, and array'd
In every garb since the first coats were made,
Whose skins exhibit like diversity,
From lightest saffron to black ebony.
They come to find all sun-dyed shades effaced,
If man can in the lineaments be traced,
And test the strength of our philanthropy.
To learn they come, perhaps to teach some things,
To barter thoughts as well as merchandize;
To view the steam-press stretch its broad white wings
And speed with light around the darken'd skies;
To see our Armstrongs, and to buy them too,
And for an iron-clad change the frail canoe.

X

Some other objects claim a casual glance
From those demure yet close-observing folk;
Such as the forms begrimed with sweat and smoke;
The panting horses that no more may prance
On the park-turf, or see the daisies dance;
The Senate in their gorgeous Gothic stalls;
The legal Sphinxes in their rusty palls;
The thieves that glimpse the strangers' gems askance;
The tricksy nymphs who smirk on them by day,
The well-shaped legs that twirl for them by night;
Priests of all creeds who for them hourly pray,
Yet at each other sometimes bark and bite:
But our considerate visitors will please
Kindly extenuate small anomales.

XI

Ay, keen observers are they. One I met,
But 'twas long since, a Persian gentleman,
Who spoke our language as few strangers can,
And look'd with his high brow and eyes of jet
One apt to learn, nor likely to forget.
With sober manhood blending ardent youth,
His soul was bent to seek and find the truth:
But did he find it—has he found it yet?
He had the Koran and our Holy Book,
And ponder'd them, but from his bosom took
His country's poets, who he said adored
With glowing hearts, instead of altar-fires,
And incense of sweet thoughts all Nature's Lord,
Before whose light at sunrise bow'd his sires.

XII

Erewhile in this same City met three men
Of diverse fame, each from a different land,
Bentham, Ramohun Roy, and Talleyrand,
To parley, but we know not what pass'd then:
Their like perchance will never meet again.
We may surmise they talk'd on one great theme,
And other topics grave, as did beseem
Their age and candour. Did they differ when
They rose to part, or were they of one mind
On the chief points of their long conference?
Or did they some of life's enigmas find
Too deep for their combined intelligence?
The Eternal Wisdom those men's council knows,
And only fools would break their calm repose.

XIII

But there are some most people honour far
Beyond sage, statesman, bard or soldier famed;
And when their advent is aloud proclaim'd,
Be it King, Emperor, Sultan, Shah or Czar,
Or modern Pharaoh, then flame tubs of tar
On every headland, then the cannons boom,
The banners float, red carpets from the loom
Fly out in mile-long strips; coach, dogcart, car,
Waggon and wain put forth their power of wheels;
Fifes scream, drums rattle, trumpets shrill, and brass
Would charm old Jubal blares, and bagpipe squeals;
And forth trot horse and pony, mule and ass,
And chargers curvet, infantry step out,
Mayors, burghers, beadles blaze, and townclerks spout.

XIV

Then turtles die by dozens, and each shire
Is sack'd for viands for the Lord Mayor's Feast,
The fields for miles are left without a beast,
Seas, lakes, and rivers yield their shoals to fire,
And whole brigades of cooks from France perspire.
Felt helmets line the streets, and grand as strong,
The Life-Guards buttock back the impetuous throng.
Then through the illumined streets the guests retire;
Then sham fights follow both on sea and land,
In which we less excel than when they are real;
Then amid cheers the mimic foes disband,
The fleets disperse; then comes the scene ideal
Which crowns the whole, and charms even Christian eyes,
The Ballet, and the Moslems dream of Paradise.

XV

So much for that in its absurd excess,
The snobbishness, the slobber and salaams;
But rare the guest whom such a surfeit crams;
John Bull through all his masquerading dress
Betrays his build, and shows his manliness;
His welcome is right hearty, though his grasp
Of kindness feels much like a gauntlet's clasp:
His warmth won't make his friends respect him less.
When comes the hour to quit this wave-girt home,
And our pure Queen does her strange friends dismiss
Most graciously, they will have far to roam
Before they find a happier land than this;
And will remember when beyond the sea
How easy 'tis to rule when men are free.

XVI

London is not a second Rome, thank God!
Nor rivals her fair sister on the Seine;
Of mangled men or beasts there is no stain
On the green turf, though sometimes on the sod
A dainty foot in pigeons' blood has trod.
To us those cities the same lessons teach,
Mouldering or scorch'd their stones stern sermons preach;
Each in its age smit by the flaming rod
Of retribution 'mid its pomps and pleasures;
Their palaces where royal guests once stay'd,
Despoil'd of all their garniture and treasures,
Let in the night, nor from the sun can shade;
And, as we gaze, we know the bolts of Heaven
May through our own strong towers and gilded roofs be driven.

XVII

How soon—how sure the lightning would rush down,
Few thought when Nero, in his pride and shame,
Received the King who from Armenia came
To take from those foul hands his lawful crown.
The Emperor donn'd his gold-embroider'd gown,
The laurell'd people in their white robes walk'd,
And with their standards the Prætorians stalk'd;
The Senate with their names of old renown
Follow'd their scented master to his seat;
And in the Forum knelt the abject king,
And offer'd homage at those cloven feet;
When a great shout went up that seem'd to spring
Like thunder from the ground, and the King trembled,
But with a smile his fear and scorn dissembled.

XVIII

How soon—how sure, later and much more nigh
The gather'd wrath from the black skies would burst,
Bears witness the mute form at Chiselhurst;
Who, if he once could Kings combined defy,
Yet, when the storm of battle had roll'd by,
Received them as his guests amid the acclaim
Of the fierce mob his sabres could not tame.
But safe in Kentish ground his ashes lie,
And God be thank'd his City is not ours,
Though once the fairest Earth has ever seen,
With its clear skies, its boulevards, and its bowers.
Heaven send it tranquil days and nights serene;
And grant us, as we wish our neighbours well,
Here still in fog and freedom and content to dwell!

XIX

But who are these with features high and stern
And manly port, who use our native speech
As 'twere their own, and come as if to teach
Their English hosts, and not from them to learn?
These are the guests for whom our bosoms yearn,
Although they have no stars upon their breasts,
And wear nor swords, nor spurs, nor lace, nor crests.
The blood their sires took from us they return
In their strong-beating hearts. 'Bone of your bone,
Flesh of your flesh,' said one of them, 'are we.'
'Yes,' I replied in a less solemn tone,
'Our quarrels are but in the family;
Should others in our private broils intrude,
They'd get proof potent of our brotherhood.'

XX

The white-hair'd traveller smiled; then as before
In earnest tones he said that, since the day
When the Mayflower from Plymouth sail'd away,
None of his kin had seen Old England's shore,
Nor he till then, and he could come no more.
He made a vow in youth, should Heaven permit,
And lack of dollars did not hinder it,
England once more should hear the name he bore,
His 'hurricane name,' which I need not repeat:
So 'home' he said to England he had come,
And glad he was each man he saw to greet
In better English, as he thought, than some
In the old land could speak the mother-tongue,
Such as his great, great grandsires learnt when young.

XXI

He told how he went first to Bunyan's grave,
Then to that corner in the Minster's pile
Which most love best, and where crowds linger while
Organ and chant fill transept, aisle and nave.
Wherever coin or kindness access gave
He went, if there was aught he cared to see,
Or hear, or handle, busy as the bee
Who at his pleasure labours like a slave,
And, as Watts says, improves each shining hour.
East, West, North, South, he rode upon the box
Beside the driver, till he knew each tower,
Each spire, each building, and with all the clocks
Acquaintance made; he call'd on those worth knowing,
Found no discourtesy and kindness overflowing.

XXII

So quaintly spoke the white-hair'd voyager,
And little kind commissions he perform'd,
Which telling me my heart towards him warm'd.
For a dear lady, long a sojourner
In the far West, he sought the rooftree where
'Mid this vast brickfield she in childhood dwelt,
And who for her first home strong love still felt.
One friend had ask'd him, nor did he defer
The pious task, to find a moss-grown tomb,
And see if still the letters could be traced
Of that friend's mother, lost in love's first bloom.
Along the green and silent path he paced,
And found the grave in which that mother slept,
And read the name, and as he read it wept.

XXIII

That this man's heart was English one more proof,
Or rather that its impulse came from Heaven.
One morning he departed for green Devon,
To seek on its North shore a humble roof,
Whose inmates, from the reek of towns aloof,
Had all their strength expended on the soil,
And now got workhouse pittance for their toil.
Soft hearts had they, if hands like teamster's hoof:
He told them of their daughter far away,
Who, poor herself, sent them what she could spare,
Which with his mite would cheer their closing day.
At the low porch he left the agèd pair
Blessing their child and him, and further West
Journey'd for friendship's sake to be my guest.

XXIV

Blood is more strong than water: yes, the sea
That severs wide that good man's land from ours
Proves that the kindred blood defies the powers
Of ocean, time, and space; that there will be
While ages roll the same fraternity.
Three centuries had not loosed the 'filial band'
That knit that stranger to the Fatherland;
And hither from each new-born colony,
And future empires stablish'd by our race
In Earth's four quarters, with each wind that blows
Will thousands come as to their native place,
Though wider seas and periods interpose;
To swell the concourse as I see these now,
To crowd the antique halls, and at the old altars bow.

XXV

Enough of such high thoughts and glorious hopes:
Time warns, and so does my consumptive purse,
To cease my rambles, and conclude my verse,
Its gravities, its gaieties, and tropes.
Westward the Sun o'er leagues of chimneys slopes,
The hostel's score is paid, but, as was said
Of Falstaff's, it includes more sack than bread;
Tankards outnumber stamps and envelopes;
And to my cost I know the 'Inns of Court,'
Though fair enough, exceed the 'Boar's Head' scale:
But here you must the inner man support,
And water is less innocent than ale.
Farewell, most sumptuous City! and farewell
To all who in thy sooty precincts dwell!

THRASEA

Trucidatis tot insignibus viris, ad postremum Nero virtutem ipsam excindere concupivit interfecto Thrasea Paeto et Barea Sorano. TACITUS.

THRASEA.

Of Paetus Thrasea no bust remains,
But in the graphic page of Tacitus
He lives and moves, and still before us stands
Amid the Senate—still his earnest voice,
Though few and terse his words, is eloquent;
And now, as on the World's great theatre,
In the most awful drama of all time
We see and hear him his high part sustain;
Dauntless as Brutus, but unstain'd with blood,
And worthy to be Cato's countryman.

And yet he seldom comes upon the stage
In the bewildering scenes that shifted fast.
He never in the dazzling throng was found
When Nero graced the boards and tuned his lute,
With tribunes and centurions by his side,
While with his grim Prætorians Burrhus kept
Detractors mute, and join'd the loud applause
When the young nobles claqued at intervals,
And haughty matrons in their ecstasy
Swoon'd at the tremors of that husky voice.

Nor in the crowd of critics was he seen
Who went to hear the Imperial rhythm scann'd,
And judge it faultless both in sound and sense:
Nor with the sages at a later hour
Who, not reluctant, towards the banquet's close,
And while the Emperor, rising from his cups,
And his bibacious courtiers laugh'd and jeer'd,

Wrangled about some grave hypothesis
As o'er a scullery bone curs snarl and snap;
Cynics in looks, but mongrels in their souls,
Who could outfawn the meanest flatterer there,
And lick'd their lips, scenting the savoury viands,
And sneer'd not at the bouquet of the wine.
Inebriate Nero knew them through their masks,
And their feign'd virtues made his foul heart worse.

At the same hour, under the starry skies
Of that Elysian clime, when not a breath
Disturb'd the myrtle leaves or fann'd the rose,
In bowers that seem'd more fit for serenades
Than for lone meditation or grave converse,
Stood Thrasea 'mid his group of Attic friends,
Exceptions rare of a degraded race,
Who came to listen rather than to teach,
And learn the example of his blameless life;

And with them brought ingenuous Roman youth,
Fresh from the schools of Athens, from the Porch
Where Thrasea's master centuries since had taught,
Or from the pensive groves of Academe.
In Zeno's, Plato's matchless tongue they spoke,
And the same subjects with like zest discuss'd,
If with less fluency and subtlety.
And Arria's kinsman, Persius, was there,
And, haply, in some pause his lines rehearsed,
Sounding like softer echoes of the Porch,
Till, when he sang of that degenerate age,
He struck the deeper chords that stir the soul,
Full harsh at times, but often toned with sorrow.

While breathed his harp, or calmly they discoursed,
Unceasing through the stilly air the roar
Of the great City like far thunder roll'd;
For then the night was added to the day.

Then trumpets shrill'd and clanging armour rang,
And the firm tread of cohorts shook the ground,
Or shouts of midnight revellers rent the sky;
And bursts of music and licentious songs
Were mingled with the growl of forest beasts
In their dark lairs, who hunger'd for man's flesh,
For which they had of late acquired a taste,
Knowing the difference of a slave's lank bones
From British muscles and a Christian's blood.

But never in the Amphitheatre
Was the mild visage of wise Thrasea seen;
Though many of his order and his creed
Held that its gory combats help'd maintain
The ancient manliness and hardihood,
As those of like degree once argued here
That the Prize-ring promoted English pluck.
He loathed yet more the new Neronian games

For which Patricians stripp'd to their white skins
From head to foot, and, glistening in their oil,
Maul'd one another while the mob look'd on
And cheer'd the blow that made the crimson spurt.
And so he shunn'd the dust when o'er the ground
Of the long Circus Nero's chariot whirl'd
In imitation of the Olympian cars,
While the spectators clapp'd, and rhapsodists
With pipes like Nero's sang Pindaric odes.

But he was found in his own proper place
When serious questions that concern'd the State
Claim'd his sound judgment and his honest vote;
Nor lack'd fit action and right emphasis,
And what he utter'd had the force of truth,
As those confess'd who would not be convinced.
Yet though his mind embraced thought's widest range,

And deem'd naught alien which affected man,
He was a Roman, and his country loved,
And still believed in her high destiny,
Then Sovereign Arbitress of all the Earth.

If Luxury was sapping through the strength
Of Roman virtue, and the cities fast
Became the sinks of rank venality,
And Rome was now the common sewer of filth
Which thither flow'd in channels from all lands,
The valour of her legions still was proof,
Nor were men wanting of heroic mould,
Eager to lead, as able to command;
And Roman justice was a proverb still,
And all the Provinces to Rome appeal'd,
Confiding in her pristine equity.
Her memories were still both spear and shield,
Her old renown was yet a rampart wall

Round her remotest frontiers, and her name
Was like a flaming sword at every gate.
Not strange the dwellers on the Seven Hills
Who walk'd the streets where cars triumphal roll'd,
Who saw the bastions of the Capitol
Gleaming as if with captured bucklers hung,
The burnish'd summits of the Palatine,
The hoary temples of the Sacred Way,
The Forum with its sculptured avenues,
The Tiber belting as with gold Mars' Field;
Pillars like marble forests covering leagues
Of dale and mountain down to the blue sea,
Fleck'd with white sails that came from every shore;
Inland the Appian and Æmilian Roads
Like giant causeways leading to the World;—
Not strange if there the meanest citizens
Trod with a haughtier step at every pace,
And had no doubt of Rome's stability.

But clouds had gather'd in that sunny sky
Black as the pall that o'er Vesuvius hangs,
With lurid gleams, before the lava bursts,
And tremblings had forewarn'd the earthquake's shock.
Horrors were in conception then whose birth
Would turn the flush'd cheeks of the revellers pale,
And the most harden'd criminals appal;
Would even test calm Thrasea's rigid creed,
And try the staunchness of his Roman nerves.
Among the portents one was seen by all;
The tree which stood where the electors met,
Under whose boughs eight hundred years before
The nurselings of the wolf had shelter found,
Wither'd in all its branches, and the trunk
Look'd sapless. But once more its leaves appear'd,
And then the timid people took fresh heart,
Suspecting not 'twas rotten at the core.

The vernal promise of the Imperial youth
Long since had been as if by lightning sear'd:
Lust through his veins in purple torrents rush'd,
And incest could not quench its burning heat;
Incest as foul as Milton has described
'Twixt Sin and Satan ere they fell from Heaven.
Then against her he fear'd not to pollute
His hatred turn'd; for still she thwarted him
In his fix'd purpose to divorce his wife,
Stainless, forlorn Octavia, and to wed
His bold, ambitious concubine, Poppæa.

But first his mother must be put aside,
And that required much caution, for astute
As proud and resolute was Agrippina,
And her great name was still a power in Rome,
Dear, as the daughter of Germanicus,
Both to the legions and the citizens;

While many loved her for her vices' sake,
Condoned if not exceeded by their own.
The deed had to be quickly, safely done,
And neither drug nor poniard was approved
In Nero's secret council, but a plan
Almost romantic in its wickedness,
Which pleased his filial piety so much
That 'twas at once applied; and tide and time
And circumstances favour'd the design.

Invited to Minerva's festival
At Baiæ by her now relenting son,
From Antium o'er the rippled sea she sail'd
With a fair gale, and when she reach'd the Port
Nero received and tenderly embraced her,
And led her to his villa near the shore,
With roses arch'd, from which she still might view
The yachts like swans embosom'd in the bay:

Among them one more splendid than the rest,
Fitted to bear her in her pleasure-trips
Along that balmy coast, or to the Isle
Of Capreæ with its many-colour'd grots,
And its tall cliffs which, as the sun went down,
Look'd like a pile of porphyry and gold.
She heard and smiled, yet to the banquet hall
Suspicious came, but soon her doubts were lull'd
By the caresses of her gracious host,
Who, when the midnight stars gleam'd on the bay,
Went with her to the beach, again embraced
Her tenderly, and watch'd her till on board
With her small retinue. The gorgeous bark
Had been so framed that on the open sea
The part where Agrippina slept would rend,
And plunge the august dreamer in the deep;
But the scheme fail'd—her hour had not yet come.

The signal given, the upper deck gave way,
And shouts and screams arose from prow to helm;
One faithful servant crush'd, another kill'd
By brutal blows intended for her mistress;
Who, floating, by a coasting boat was saved,
And from her villa on the Lucrine Lake
Promptly, though conscious of the murderous plot,
Despatch'd a loving message to her son,
Telling him that, by favour of the gods
And his good auspices, she had escaped!

Sorely the son the disappointment felt,
But soon found willing tools for surer work,
And earn'd for aye the name of Parricide:
But how 'twas done let Tacitus relate.
Nero would in his slumbers start and gaze
As if he saw her blood-stain'd ghost, or heard
Her dying shriek; but to his chamber sprang

Courtiers, centurions, tribunes, to allay
His terrors, and to gratulate the fiend
That he had 'scaped his mother's dark designs;
Then to the temples went to bless the gods,
While he inconsolable wept for her!
But the indignant people judged aright,
As in like cases they but rarely fail:
Yet chief on Seneca their odium fell,
Who, if he did not from the first abet,
Had with his rhetoric gilded that black crime.

And what did Thrasea think or say or do?
The Fathers, heedless of the public voice,
Competing in servility, decreed
That there should be thanksgiving at each altar,
That to Minerva's festival thenceforth
Games should be added, and her statue placed
With Nero's in the Senate-house, and that

His mother's birthday should unhallow'd be.
Then Thrasea, who had voted not nor spoke,
Rose up and left the hall, and from that day
To certain and prompt vengeance he was doom'd.

Again we see him in the Senate-house
When 'gainst Antistius, prætor then, the charge
Of libelling the Emperor in coarse verse,
At Scapula's crowded table, was preferr'd.
The law of majesty, long obsolete,
Was for the purpose suddenly revived,
And then Marullus voted that the accused
Should for his scurrilous numbers suffer death,
More majorum, naked, by the scourge
(As critic's cat kills sorry scribblers now).
But Thrasea, while admitting the offence,
Urged they should pass, as later laws prescribed,
A sentence which would save them from the charge

Of cruelty, and not disgrace the age.
Exile, he said, would be meet punishment,
And his humaner policy prevail'd;
Although Vitellius, chief of flatterers,
But to the upright ever insolent,
Denounced with vehemence the plea for mercy,
And some, from various motives, cheer'd his words.
The consuls waver'd, and the Emperor,
With phrases meaning more than they express'd,
Referr'd the sentence to the Senate, when
Thrasea was heard once more, and they concurr'd;
And so Antistius saved his life and skin,
But Nero did not Thrasea's words forget.

Burrhus had died, by poison some affirm'd,
And courteous Seneca was soon cast off:
For Tigellinus had supplanted him,
Of base the basest, and of foul most foul,

Pander to all his master's varied vices,
And leader of the gang of parasites
And other reptiles from the city slime
That in the Imperial courts and chambers swarm'd.
This man, for his own ends, fill'd with alarms
The despot's craven soul; and, at his hint,
Fell Sylla, Drusus' grandson, and the head
Being brought to Nero, at the hairs grown grey
Before their time hyena-like he laugh'd.
A eunuch from the palace then was sent
To see that exiled Plautus was dispatch'd;
And, when the brave man's sever'd head was placed
At Nero's feet, again he laugh'd and gibed,
And not less merry was his paramour;
While he declared his villain thoughts aloud,
How, as with heads the obstacles fell fast,
He would divorce his wife and wed Poppæa.
And so it was accomplish'd; first by means

Of subornation, oaths being cheap as strong,
And the sad wife was falsely sworn unchaste,
And left to ruffians, who bound fast her limbs,
Open'd each vein, and drown'd her in hot steam.
And to the gods oblations were decreed!

Did Thrasea in the obsequious Senate
With Seneca that blasphemy approve?
Had it been so the historian would have told,
For he records each fact with stern precision.
Crime followed crime, and the red catalogue
Surpass'd the slaughter of Eighth Henry's reign,
Long as the Newgate Calendar when thieves
And forgers from the ropes with murderers swung.
But those this Monster slew were Earth's best men
And purest women, virtue their sole crime,
Or patriotism, or else that they declined
To join his orgies and applaud his trills.

Yet, as each more atrocious deed was done,
The Fathers did not fail to thank the gods;
But Thrasea from the rites still kept aloof.

Wars in far lands; the Armenian King dethroned;
Britons in arms to avenge their outraged Queen;
The standards lost, but instantly recover'd;
Poppæa's babe defunct and deified;
Ambassadors from Parthia and all Earth;
A King—as Princes later kiss'd Popes' slippers—
Placing his crown at Nero's statue's feet;
While the hoarse warbler charm'd Neapolis,
And ran his circle of insane excess,
Rushing from farce to real tragedy.

'Mong others who had secret hints to die
By their own hands, Augustus' grandson one,
Silanus, his sole guilt his pedigree.
He knew his time was come—his freedmen seized

And fetter'd signalised his speedy fate;
And so, judicious as magnificent,
And not less brave, he from both arms let out
The life-blood, and in dignity expired.

One night, as Thrasea his garden paced,
And there with his sublime philosophy,
Or in deep converse with his few fast friends,
Strove to forget the horrors of the times,
Flames from the Circus rose, where it adjoins
Both to Mount Cælius and the Palatine,
And soon before the wind like billows spread,
Tossing their flashing crests to the black sky.
The thick-wall'd houses, and the solid fanes,
And public structures built to last all time,
No barrier proved, but on the red waves rush'd
Till all the level was a sea of fire.
And then the crimson deluge reach'd the hills,

Surmounting pillars, villas, pinnacles,
Engulphing gardens, groves and palaces,
Till each ascent like a volcano roar'd,
And all heaven's concave like a furnace glow'd.
And shriller than ten thousand trumpets rang
The cries of men and women, and the shrieks
Of children driven from their burning homes;
While, at safe distance, from Mæcenas' tower
Nero admiring, shuddering, view'd the scene,
Till, with a fine dramatic frensy seized,
He snatch'd the lyre and in his theatre
Sang to the applauding throng the Sack of Troy.

And when at last the flames were all extinct,
Amid the ashes he a palace built
Fit for the monarch of more worlds than one,
With lakes and forests stretching far and wide:
For which all Italy, the Provinces,

And Rome's allies were tax'd—the temples robb'
Of votive gifts and statues of their gods.

How came that fire? The angry people said
Nero or those he sent had kindled it;
And, to divert the charge, he fix'd the guilt
On the new sect that from Judea came,
And wretches were found ready so to swear.
Then harmless men and women, whose offence
Was the meek faith which now pervades the Ear
Were tortured with refinements that surpass'd
The skill of demons. Some in mockery clad
In skins of beasts, and cast to ravenous dogs;
Others like their loved Master crucified;
Some staked and burnt; some with ingredi
smear'd
And used as torches when the hours grew dark!
And Nero, that the people might enjoy

The spectacle, the Imperial gardens lent,
Adding the Circus' sports, and there himself
Performing, the brute rabble to amuse,
Until at last there rose a cry of 'Shame!'
And angry murmurs stopp'd the torturers.

And what thought Thrasea of those who bore
Their agonies with such surpassing firmness?
Heard he the prayers the victims breathed, their hymns
Which sounded like the songs of victory?
Were some of them his freedmen or his slaves?
Had he or any of his household seen
The Apostle, or had they the Epistle read
To those same Romans, painted to the life
In the first chapter, naked in their shame?
Or had some youth in Thrasea's portico
Been present at the sermon on Mars' Hill,

And made report, and of the altar there
Built by the Athenians to the Unknown God
They ignorantly worshipp'd, but whom Paul
Had thither journey'd to declare to them?
Or look'd he on the Christians as a sect
Derived from those same stiff monotheists
Who sojourn'd then in Rome as once in Thebes
And Babylon, and now in London dwell?
Thrasea bow'd not before his country's gods,
But to the God whom Socrates adored,
Whom Zeno worshipp'd and Cleanthes hymn'd,
And Cicero and Seneca confess'd,
'Father of all in every age and clime.'
That such were 'almost Christians' who can doubt
Devious and far they sought the gate of Heaven,
Yet haply reach'd the threshold of God's house,
And few in all the ages have done more.

But darker hours came on, yet even then
A soul would shine at times like a fix'd star,
While some like meteors flash'd through cloud and storm.
The fire on Freedom's altar look'd extinct,
But sent up fitful gleams, soon quench'd in blood;
As seen, when roused from their voluptuous ease,
Piso and others of ancestral fame
Conspired to strike the recreant Cæsar down,
And, when betray'd, like Romans met their fate;
Though all were by Epicharis surpass'd,
A feeble woman and enfranchised slave,
From whom nor threats, nor fire, nor scourge, nor rack,
Nor brutal fury could a name extort.
On Seneca suspicion then was cast,
And his Imperial pupil sent him word
He must resolve to die, and gave no time

To moralise on princely gratitude;
And nobly by his death the white-hair'd sage
Redeem'd the faults and errors of his life.
Lucan in the delator's net was caught,
And, after weakness rare in Roman breasts,
While shrinking from the rack, grew firm again,
And let the blood flow freely; and, when chill
And faint, recited with a calm clear voice
His lines describing how a soldier died.

Soon others fell, and Thrasea's time drew near.
How, when at last the fatal hour should come,
He would sustain the shock none doubted who
Had seen his changeless equanimity
Throughout the terrors of those evil days.
Others meanwhile, who were of softer clay,
Whose souls were not with honour's breastplate arm'd
Who seem'd mere fops or were stale sensualists,

Confronted the stern messenger with smiles.
Witness Petronius, poet of ill fame,
The arbiter of elegance, chief priest
And worshipper of deities obscene;
Who with his various gifts, as chance befell,
Could charm a brothel or a province rule,
And play'd with life and death as children's toys;
And, daring to anticipate his doom,
Prick'd his blue veins, then closed them and resumed
His gay discourse, and heard or sang sweet verse,
Gave to some servants presents, and for some
Order'd the stripes deserved, and last bequeathed
To Nero the true tale of Nero's life,
And, having sign'd it with his seal, then died.
How gratefully the legatee received
The rare memento needless to describe.

In Thrasea's and Soranus' persons now

He hoped in his crazed fancy 'to destroy
Virtue itself.' Such are the very words
Of him whose stile has for all time engraved
Their names upon the adamant of truth.
Kindred they were in virtue, not in blood.
Soranus, as procousul, had evinced
A justice rare towards a subject province,
And for the statues of some local gods,
As rulers practise still, had shown respect.
These acts and others like were his sole crimes.
But against Thrasea still more vague the charge,
Though upon him, as he expected, pour'd
All the resentment which in that black heart
Like hemlock in a vial had long been pent.
Among his crimes were abstinence from vice;
His strict adherence to the Stoic sect;
His manners copied from the ancient modes;
His fearless bearing in the Senate-house

When he had enter'd it, though for three years
He had not once been seen within its walls;
His absence from the theatres and temples;
And last, but not the least, of his offences,
That when, to Rome's dismay, 'august' Poppæa
Suddenly in maternal pangs expired,
And then with solemn rites was deified,
Thrasea bow'd not to her divinity!
Though the conclusion had been long foregone,
It was but decent to prefer a bill
With these and other counts, and to procure
A public prosecutor and so forth;
And all was done according to the rule.

Meanwhile the City was astir to see
The Armenian Prince, then fast approaching Rome,
From Nero's hands resume his diadem;
And forth the people went to meet the Prince,

Brought like a captive in the Imperial car.
But Thrasea, forbidden to attend,
Sent Nero a memorial, ask'd to know
What act of his had merited displeasure,
And pledged himself the accusers to confute,
Were a fair hearing granted. Nero look'd
For courtlier phrases, and a meek appeal
To his dread power and sovereign clemency;
Refused an audience, daring not to meet
The fearless countenance of that just man,
And to the obsequious Senate left the case.

What then in Thrasea's home, or in the shade
Of his fair garden pass'd among his friends,
The historian tells from records long since lost.
Some urged his presence in the Senate-house;
His simple words, his virtues and his truth
Not only would convince the Conscript Fathers,

But make the Forum echo with applause,
And even the heart of Nero might relent.
If not, he in the after times would be
Distinguish'd by his faithful death from those
Who went with shame in silence to the grave.

Others, less sanguine, urged him to remain
In his own house, and there await the issue.
There he was safe from scurrilous insolence,
And passions that to outrage would incite.
They trusted not the Senate, and to hope
Nero would change was to mistake his nature;
And then his wrath on Thrasea's home would fall.
So, let him to his life, his teachers true,
Abide his fate and emulate their glory.

Then Arulenus, with the warmth of youth,
Offer'd at once, as tribune of the people,

To interpose with his authority;
But Thrasea, mildly checking his hot zeal,
Warn'd him his efforts were of no avail
To save his friend, and might to him prove fatal.
As for himself, he had lived out his days,
And must not now his life's long course abandon;
While Arulenus had but just commenced
His public duties, and should ponder well
How in such perilous times to shape his course.
But whether to appear before the Senate,
Thrasea the point reserved, and with farewells
Scarce audible for sighs his friends retired.

What more befell let those who would enquire
Turn for the details to the historian's page.
Suffice to say, Prætorian cohorts form'd,
Hired citizens with swords beneath their gowns
Each avenue invested; in the Forum,

The squares, the temples, bands of soldiers took
Their stations, and the Fathers through them pass'd.
So was the farce of justice then perform'd
With all the pomp and panoply of law,
As centuries after in a distant Isle
When Raleigh, Russell, Sidney were arraign'd,
And that was not three hundred years ago.

The Emperor's quæstor in his name commenced :—
The Fathers (but he mention'd no one) had
The Commonwealth deserted, and had taught
By their examples Roman knights to waste
Their time in sloth, regardless of the State.
Not strange provincial senators were absent,
When men of consular rank, and even those
Of sacerdotal dignity, then thought
Of nothing but the adornment of their villas,
The beauty of their gardens and their grounds.

A curious preface to a charge of treason,
And as much heeded as at an Assize
The Royal Proclamation against Vice.
'Twas but the text for others to improve:
Delators were at hand, and orators
As venal, or to win Imperial smiles,
Embolden'd by the absence of the accused,
Pour'd forth their turbid torrents of invective.
The oaths were sworn, the Senate was convinced,
Nor was the prejudged sentence long deferr'd.

That day Soranus with his daughter stood
In the same hall; she in the bloom of life,
Of husband reft, beside her grey-hair'd sire.
Questions she answer'd truly, piteously,
And then her father could no more restrain,
Pleading as only father can for child,
And pray'd on him alone the stroke should fall.

Last of the list of the false witnesses
The old man's client came, Egnatius,
Who added to his long hypocrisy
The deeper guilt of base ingratitude.
His presence raised loud murmurs, soon suppress'd,
As by the lictors sobs had been before.
Then follow'd the decree, but Nero's heart
Was moved to let them choose their mode of death!

And Thrasea received like clemency,
Much favour'd to be spared the rack and scourge,
Or the rude thrust of the centurion's blade,
And that the sentence on his son-in-law,
Helvidius, was no worse than banishment;
Though love of country was with some so strong
They counted death the milder penalty,
While others whom the informers still left free
Envied the fate of those who had to die.

Wide Rome was now an Amphitheatre,
A human slaughter-house, the stench of blood
Poison'd the air, and the deep sea was tinged.
The wise, the just, the gentle and the brave
Waited the turn of a demoniac's thumbs,
Whose mercy for the vilest was reserved.
Pity had perish'd in the people's hearts,
Imbruted by the ceaseless butchery:
But was there no compassion in the skies,
No bolt of wrath Divine behind the cloud?

Thrasea, towards the close of that dark day,
Calmly expectant in his garden talk'd
With many friends illustrious of each sex
Nor least regarded there Demetrius spoke,
For virtue as for wisdom eminent,
Teacher not only, but of truth the witness;
And life eternal was the fitting theme.

Perhaps they cited what all knew by heart,
The Phædo, or from lucid Tully read
Passages apt for their great argument;
Or some one quoted from the glowing page
Where, after fond remembrance of lost friends,
And sages who had long since pass'd away,
He yearns to join them, and with rapture hails,
As if 'twere dawning then, the happy day
When he should leave the din and mire of Earth
For the high council of immortal souls.
And haply at that moment scatter'd groups,
Or gatherings of only two or three
Pale, harass'd converts of the Christian faith,
In murky catacomb or cavern'd rock
Were longing for the same celestial home,
The mansions of the Father's house in Heaven,
Whither their dying Lord had led the way.

Not yet had Thrasea heard of the decree.
A hasty step the garden now approach'd—
'Twas Cæcilianus, who with faltering voice
Announced to them the dire intelligence,
When all assembled melted into tears
Save him it most concern'd, who, while he felt
Their sympathy, and heard their loud lament,
Fearing their sorrow would themselves involve
In future peril, urged them to depart.
Then Arria,—daughter of that Roman wife
Who in her own breast plunged the steel to nerve
Her husband's soul,—resolved with him to die;
But he, more wise and not less loving, bade
Her still to live for their young daughter's sake.

And Thrasea walk'd the portico, and met
The quæstor with a cheerful countenance,
Who gave to him the warrant of his death:

Which having read, he to his chamber went,
Helvidius and Demetrius following him.
He call'd them not to see a Stoic die,
As our good Addison from his pillow ask'd
A friend to witness how a Christian died;
But when they enter'd, he in their sad gaze
Extended both his arms, and the sharp steel
Open'd his veins; and, as the warm blood gush'd,
Bidding the quæstor to draw nearer him,
And sprinkling with red drops the floor, he said—
'To Jove the Liberator let us make
Libation. Look, young man, and may the gods
Avert the omen! You are born in times
When it behoves that you should fortify
Your soul with firm examples.'—Afterward,
As with his lingering death the pangs increased,
He to Demetrius turn'd——

But what he said
At that grave moment we shall never know,
For there the record ends—the rest is lost!
Who dares supply that blank? Shakespeare alone
Might venture, as he told how Brutus died;
Or haply his invention had forborne
To find fit words for Thrasea's dying thoughts.
Thousands of scholars have from age to age
Read to that place; as men o'er some grand scene
Pass on till hinder'd by a chasm abrupt:
Some shudder—others sigh—and all would wish
The void fill'd up; but like the depth profound
Of death appears to me that sudden blank.

To Thrasea this late tribute due from one
Returning with grey hairs to his old books,
Like pilgrim wandering 'mong forgotten tombs,
Who chances on some memorable name,

And tries to read the time-blurr'd lines beneath.
Such my rude rendering of the broken urn
Inscribed with Thrasea's fame by Tacitus
In their undying tongue. Though few the words,
The lines more brief than modern epitaphs,
They breathe and thrill as when, with pride and shame,
Degenerate Romans the memorial read,
Then fresh and perfect from the master's hand;
And centuries hence that tragic episode
Will strike a chord in the most callous breast,
And claim the homage of the loftiest soul.
Even in this our hard mechanic age,
Whirl'd by the steam-car thro' our life's short day,
We glance at the examples of old times
As at the hoary ruins on the hills,
With wonder and with awe. And some there are
Who, 'scaping from the ceaseless rush and din,
Still love to linger if but for an hour,

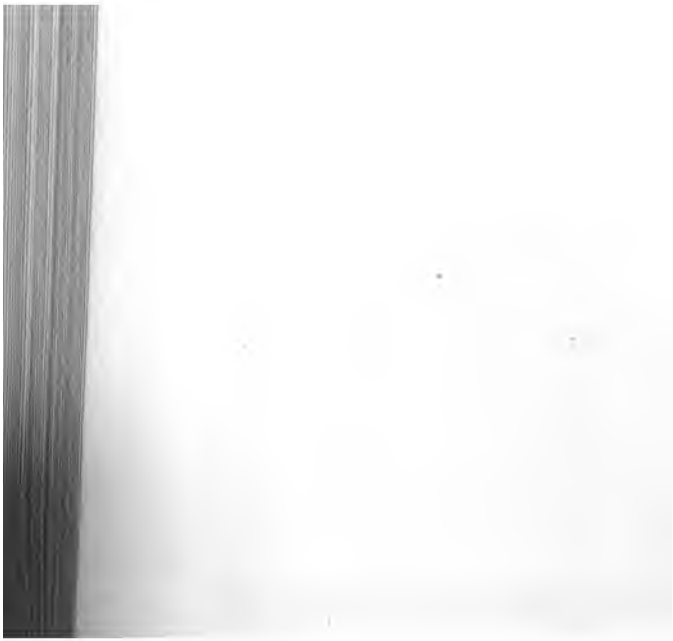
And nearer view the Pillars of the Past;

To pace the ground where the majestic forms

Of glorious Eld have left for us to trace

The certain footmarks of the Sons of God.

MISCELLANEOUS VERSES.



WHERE AFTER DEATH?

I

Be not alarm'd—I'm not about to preach
On a text taken from the churchyard stones,
More touchingly whose mute mementos teach
Than eloquence in its most suasive tones.
Beyond the grave their intimations reach;
And, when in the still valley of dry bones
The priest affirms the rising of the dead,
The mourners doubt not, and are comforted.

II

Hope and affection in that faith agree:
But where until, as in Ezekiel's vision,
The dry bones stir, will those who own'd them be?
Old poets saw pale shades in fields Elysian
Or doleful Tartarus; but, more recently,
With almost geographical precision
The dead have had their latitudes defined,
Whether to bliss or penal terms consign'd.

III

For all their learning and their zeal we thank
The theologians, clerical or lay;
Some light they shed, like glowworms on a bank,
If not like Will' o' th' wisps that lead astray.
Truth's mine, which God at Earth's foundation sank
Lies deep and dark, and feeble is the ray
That guides us there, and still with earnest thought
Its scatter'd veins must through the rock be sought.

IV

But some, who claim to be interpreters
Of the great Book and its more mystic pages,
Wield words like swords, and letters use as spurs;
And woe to him who in the lists engages
If not as well equipt, or who prefers
To stand spectator while the conflict rages!
The blows sweep wide, and, if with dawn begun,
The battle will outlast the setting sun.

V

Others in meekness learn, and kind impart;
The earliest lesson which to them was given
Was charity, and that they got by heart;
They think in patience, but will not be driven
By threats or scourges, nor make others smart:
Of such as these the kingdom is of Heaven;
Guileless as gentle, God such children loves,
If wise as serpents, harmless as the doves.

VI

Long since I knew a wise yet child-like man,
My Mentor, and my own familiar friend,
Who, though he loved some ancient verse to scan,
Would o'er the tomes of classic sages bend
By day and night while years their current ran,
As if his studies ne'er would have an end.
The moderns in each language he perused,
The Bible in the tongues its authors used.

VII

The historic page, which we now read with awe,
To him had been stern fact; the blood then shed
Pour'd while he gazed, and he in memory saw
The victims rise like spectres from the dead.
Time-hallow'd links proved then but wisps of straw
And of authority was left no shred,
Freedom was frenzy, and the social band
Was sever'd as it were a rope of sand.

VIII

But those appalling annals now are stale,
And other great events have since rush'd by,
Which would have turn'd the man I speak of pale,
Brave as he was, a form to fill one's eye,
Stalwart in mind as in his body hale,
Wrangler or wrestler who could once defy:
Rare in his time such men, so rare in ours
We scarce believe their stature and their powers.

IX

His days of toil were over, and in peace
And love he then might spend his last few years:
But Knowledge did not yet her son release
From her blest service; and, relieved from cares,
His mental ardour did the more increase,
As the steed's paces when the goal it nears.
But all his thoughts to higher themes were given,
The goal of life—eternity—and Heaven.

X

He penn'd those thoughts in part, and I have now
The manuscript before me, written plain
With a firm hand, denoting a calm brow,
Though he had borne his share of grief and pain.
Bent was the lofty stem, and bare the bough,
And, haply, leaves would not put forth again;
Yet still the roots held fast, though on the brink
Of a wide chasm. 'Twas this which made him think.

XI

Ay, when at last we reach the verge of death,
And know we may not our dim path retrace,
It is not strange we pause with bated breath;
Not strange, when we must leave life's warm embrace
For the cold earth and dark abyss beneath,
If hopes to doubts, and doubts to fears give place:
Then startling thoughts flash through the dullest brain,
And maniacs their lost faculties regain.

XII

The faith of him I mention ne'er was shaken:
Who life bestow'd, he said, could life restore,
Nor would man be by Heaven at last forsaken.
Yet, turning to his bookshelves as before,
His old preceptors by the hand were taken
As bosom friends, and with them he once more
Communed as living souls; but best of these
Loved Plato and the martyr Socrates.

XIII

Their Roman pupils too claim'd his regard,
But Cicero and sad Lucretius most;
And these with their great teachers he compared,
And seem'd to think them all in mazes lost
Of speculation, that alike all shared
The fate of helmless ships on Ocean toss'd:
He found the Hebrew sage no surer guide,
But did with all his heart in Christ confide.

XIV

This his last thesis—oft before discuss'd—
Where will the soul be in the interval
From death till the revival of man's dust?
You hear that question at each funeral,
And answer'd sometimes with a pious trust,
Or fancies which the poets' dreams recall:
My dear friend's answer still remains untold,
For while he held the pen his hand grew cold.

XV

All but complete the preface ere that chill,
But there the script broke off, save some few lines
Pinn'd on the page which he had next to fill.
Death came, but of his coming gave no signs,
Yet ready to obey the Master's will
The servant found. To-night the moonbeam shines
Upon his grave; and in a calmer sphere
Heaven grant his soul may rest where all is clear!

THE RECLUSE OF AVIGNON.

As GALILEO in his tower
  The volume of the skies perused,
MILL calmly in Avignon's bower
  On this world's graver problems mused;
His thoughts as deep, his sense as clear,
While his breast never felt a fear.

II

But otherwhile, in other place,
Stern Duty curb'd his growing powers;
And to the desk with no ill grace
He turn'd and gave his life's best hours;
Proving no useful labour can
Disgust—still less disgrace—a man.

III

But 'mid his drudgery he found
The leisure of which Bacon told,
And soon became like him renown'd,
Among Earth's Master Minds enroll'd;
Nor fail'd when in the Hall he stood
To make the noble title good.

IV

Various and bold his themes: on one
His words would glow, his ken expand,
The liberty which injures none,
That loosens not the social band,
Leaves conscience and opinion free,
And gives full scope to energy.

V

But while his mind the world could grasp,
And his heart throbb'd with love for all,
Some to his bosom he would clasp
Who now in tears his troth recall;
And to the dust of one dear form
He clung, as if with life yet warm.

VI

The flowers he planted on her tomb
Still with their fragrance thank his care;
And birds around his lattice come,
And sing as if he still was there;
For he was not more wise than kind,
And everywhere co-mates could find.

VII

More sweetly 'neath yon arching trees
He sleeps than 'neath the Minster's roof;
If far from its grand harmonies,
Far from all harsher sounds aloof:
He lacks no voice to cheer him now,
And needs no sculpture for his brow.

VIII

Earnest and gentle soul, farewell!
Long will Earth's sages mourn thy loss,
And scholars on thy precepts dwell;
And some the stormy seas will cross
As pilgrims to Avignon's bower,
Now sacred as Arcetri's tower.*

* In the illustrated edition of 'Italy,' by Samuel Rogers, ere is an engraving of Arcetri, the place where Galileo was nfined by the Inquisition for seven years, and from which he is liberated only by death

FEEBLE AND OLD.

I

FEEBLE and old,

Weary and cold,

Famish'd and poor,

I sat by the door

Of a villa just built,

With its knocker all gilt.

A man in white hose,

With bright buttons in rows,

Ask'd me what I did there?

And bade me beware

That the County police
Impounded stray geese,
Nabb'd all tramps they could catch,
And for beggars kept watch.
Then with sore heart and feet
In the dust and the heat
I went on my way
Till the close of the day.

II

I rested awhile
In the sun's last smile
On a heathy bank,
And deeply drank
From a stream that flow'd near,
So cool and so clear,
Which to kine that grazed nigh,
And to birds that flew by,

And to outcasts like me
Was left open and free;
To all who thirst given
A blessing from Heaven.
As I sat there I ponder'd
On those who once wander'd
Footsore and athirst,
Till the pure water burst
At the stroke of the rod
Of the prophet of God.

III

I open'd the Book
Where I never did look
In my care and my grief
Without finding relief;
And, while dews cool'd my brow,
Read of Dives, and how

In purple and linen,
Which there was small sin in,
He sumptuously fared,
But for Lazarus spared
Not the luxuries spread
On the board, nor the bread,
As he lay at the gate,
And did patiently wait
For the crumbs as they fell;
While the dogs who love well
The poorest of men
Came and lick'd his sores then.

IV

I dwelt on each line,
That misery seem'd mine;
But shall I find rest
In the land of the blest?

The sky then look'd brighter,
And my heart felt lighter;
I heard a child laugh,
I took up my staff,
And ask'd her my way,
And she led me as gay
As a lamb in the Spring,
Or a lark on the wing,
Over cowslips and over
The sweet-scented clover.
We reach'd a neat cot
In a green shelter'd spot,
Where a ruddy man smiled
And kiss'd the fair child.

V

I could not beg there,
They had nothing to spare,

So I wish'd them good-night!

But the man saw my plight,

Feeble and old,

Weary and cold,

Famish'd and poor,

And closed not the door,

But bade me come in,

Saying want was no sin.

His wife kind and comely,

The fare good if homely,

I rested and fed,

And clean straw was my bed.

I thank'd them and wept,

And pray'd ere I slept

For God's blessing on labour.

That man was my 'neighbour.'

A MODERN THANE.

A MAN of high degree and large estate
Unostentatious dwells in his old Hall,
Well-pleased when on its threshold footsteps fall
Of bidden guests; and strangers coming late
Through the long avenues have not long to wait,
Whether they seek his kindness or advice:
Who pulls the bell has not to sound it twice,
And 'gainst the poor he never bars his gate,
Yet cares to know his alms are well bestow'd.
Humane yet firm, generous as self-denying,
He scatters not his largess on the road,
Succours in secresy the sick and dying,
And builds a hospital with no intent
That it shall be his public monument.

DAWN.

Due as the lark at dawn's glad hour
My grateful voice its matin sings;
And not a bird can leave the bower
But finds me on my fancy's wings.
I would not miss the day's first beam
For the soft pillow's happiest dream;
I would not fail for all the world
To see the flowers with dew impearl'd.

II

One thrush before the rest I hear,
Close by my window on the thorn,
Whose notes at first, not loud and clear,
But low and soft, salute the Morn.
Of prayer they mind me more than praise.
The fitting prelude of bright days;
And then he pauses—but not long,
Then joyous sings his wordless song.

III

Then two—then three—then four and more
Compete in rapturous melody;
But soon their gushing wildnotes pour
In strains of glorious harmony.
Then all the choirs in all the woods
Blend with the voices of the floods,
And, as the concord spreads and swells,
From the grey towers ring out the bells.

IV

Why should not all thus greet the dawn
In glen and town, on hill and shore?
Why should we ever drowse or yawn,
Or, waking, crave one slumber more?
Why should not we together rise
And sing when larks ascend the skies?
Is it so hard to thank kind Heaven?
Enough of sleep has Death not given?

V

But ere I rose I had a dream
Which seem'd a glimpse of future times,
When mountain-altars at the gleam
Of light will kindle in all climes;
When, as the waters the wide sea,
Knowledge will cover Earth and be
So fraught with love, truth, holiness,
That God again his work will bless.

VI

On—on with breezy wings I flew
From land to land, from isle to isle,
And o'er the boundless Ocean blue,
That mirror'd Morning's rosy smile;
And in the mid-air clear and calm
Continuous rose the same grand psalm
From town and forest, sea and river,
'Praise Him and magnify Him for ever!'

LIFE

I

DESCRIBE me life. A blossom'd thorn,
A poppy waving in the corn,
Waiting the silent reaper's thrust,
A bubble's shadow, dreams and dust.

II

Give me some other similes.
The thistle-down before the breeze,
A leaf, a flower, a bead of dew,
A gossamer—what more would you ?

III

Your fancy's fertile—try again.
'Tis a steed bounding on the plain,
'Tis a sail scudding from the strand,
A bird, a wave, a drift of sand.

IV

Can you no other symbols find ?
A cadence wafted on the wind,
The fitful breathing of a shell,
The echo of a plaintive bell.

THE CASTS.

I

CASTS were they of the features fine
Of wise and good and honour'd men;
But soon the damps effaced each line,
And they were lumps of clay again.
So did the living forms decay,
And turn into their native clay;
But why so much the casts deplore,
If God will their lost moulds restore?

II

Will He? You preach it and believe,
And let my faith your creed sustain,
That the dear friends for whom we grieve
Still link'd with us by love remain:
The looks, the smiles, the tones we miss,
The hallow'd sweetness of the kiss,
The warmth of hand and heart, I never
Can believe lost, and lost for ever.

III

And thinking of their pains and cares,
So bravely met, so meekly borne,
Their tears and sighs and secret prayers,
Their tenderness, did others mourn,
Their patient toil, their earnest thought,
Their wisdom by hard lessons bought,
Their lofty hopes, their filial trust
In God,—I feel they are not dust.

THE ABBEY.

I

After the service had begun
I reach'd the ancient Minster's door,
That leads where busts of English bards
Are group'd above the storied floor.
I oft had linger'd on that spot,
And felt it hard to lift my feet,
But came to pray, and slipt a coin,
And in God's house I got a seat.

II

Such was the custom then—not now,
Though silver keys still fit most locks;
And vergers' fingers were not made
Merely to point like hands of clocks.
Like priests, save few, they are ill-paid,
They have a semi-cleric look,
And some of them can sermonise
Like priests, but need nor script nor book.

III

Enough of them and of their kind.
What struck me most in that vast pile,
Ev'n more than its old sanctities,
And memories hallowing every aisle,
Was the large concourse gather'd there
From almost every town and shire;
Quiet but earnest English folk,
Who came to ponder and admire.

IV

They seem'd to think the place was theirs,
Built by their people, stone by stone;
That the great dead their kindred were,
That England's glories were their own:
Those whose white statues round them stood
Were eloquent in England's tongue,
And every poet there inscribed
Had in their native language sung.

V

And when the organ's mighty voice
Did to the eager quire appeal,
And they sent up their grand response,
Inspired as if with equal zeal,
A thrill pervaded all that throng,
And countless voices swell'd the sound,
Till, as the rolling concord ceased,
All knelt, and felt 'twas holy ground.

VI

The organ's prelude, slow and soft,
Now still'd the rising audience,
And soon the anthem's seraph-tones
Held every soul in rapt suspense;
And then one voice from out the rest,
To which an angel's lip seem'd given,
Breathed such sweet strains the dullest there
Believed that he was nearer Heaven.

VII

The preacher rose—rose to his theme,
No flowery fop, no brainless youth,
A man who in good English spoke
The words of soberness and truth;
Worthy to stand in that high place
And plead with those assembled souls;
His model Paul, whose common-sense
Firmly his rhetoric controls.

VIII

But while he reason'd, and some heard
And trembled as proud Felix did,
Came sounds as if a flock went by,
And dogs that bark'd as they were bid:
Ewes answer'd to their bleating lambs,
As ruthless drovers did compel
Into some pen or close hard by,
And sadly chimed a wether's bell.

IX

Strange thoughts disturb'd the human flock
Within the Minster's area penn'd,
Of whom not few dwelt in the fields,
And daily did their sheepfolds tend.
A natural sympathy they felt,
Reminded of their pastoral charge,
Of meads like those that flock had left,
And the still water's grassy marge.

X

But soon such wandering fancies ceased,
And bravely went the preacher on;
Nor fail'd those bleatings to suggest
Fit tropes and apt comparison.
Those harmless creatures have been types
Of innocence from times of old;
And, when like sheep we stray, we trust
To reach the Heavenly Shepherd's fold.

XI

The sermon ended; a calm voice
The solemn benediction gave;
The organ peal'd a joyous tune,
Like clarions, marching from a grave;
And forth the congregation came,
And found close by the Minster yard
The way-worn flock, and few that saw
But did with piteous hearts regard.

VIOLETS FROM THE TOMB OF KEATS

(Gathered by L.P. and sent by her from Rome to Cornwall, Dec. 1877.)

I fain believe your hand these violets gave,
And that they were this morning cull'd by you
From the blue cluster which, impearl'd with dew,
Diffused its fragrance on the poet's grave.
'Twas kind as thoughtful, gentle friend, to save
These tender blossoms from the winter wind
Which chills ev'n your bright clime, and yet more kind,
Since I no more may cross the Southern wave,

To send these tokens of that hapless youth,
Who, while his brow was wreathed with deathless flowers,
Felt in his panting breast the envenom'd tooth,
And found but one true friend in his last hours;
Though Shelley now by his dear side is sleeping,
And many come, and few refrain from weeping

A SONG OF AFTER YEARS.

I

We have lived, dear old sweetheart! years many,
Since we met in the dawn of our love;
But no change can I find, if there's any,
Except that you yearly improve.

II

You know I'm not going to flatter,
That your cheek is more pale makes me sigh,
Your hair is less dark, but no matter,
If less lustrous there's light in your eye.

III

Your brow shows some touches of sorrow,
And of time I discover a trace;
But I think not of wrinkle or furrow
When I see the old smile on your face.

IV

By the hearth in the chill of November
When I grieve for life's fugitive bliss,
At your beck Love rekindles each ember,
And dark thoughts are dispersed by a kiss.

O SING AGAIN

I

Dear, obliging, gifted girl !
  Sing, O sing, again to me ;
Pure as morning's sprinkled pearl
  Is your rose-lip's melody ;
Soft at times as pity's tear,
Then like wine-beads bright and clear.

II

You have caught a nightingale,
  And have caged it in your breast,
And it seems to like its gaol
  Better than its leafy nest,
And more blithely carols now
Than when on the hazel bough.

III

While you warble, charming maid,
My slow pulse begins to dance,
My white hairs are tinged with shade,
My dim eyes reflect your glance:
Sing again, and on my face
Not a wrinkle you will trace.

IV

But sing no new song, sweet mouth!
Sing me 'Love's young dream' once more;
Like rare odours from the South
Wafted to a wintry shore,
Falls on my cold heart that strain—
Sing, O sing it once again!

SO HAVE I

I

Have you ever blown a bubble,
  Have you chased a butterfly,
Have you gone in quest of trouble?
  Yes—and so have I.

II

Have you lean'd upon a reed,
  Have you known proud folks look shy,
Have you found friends fail in need?
  Yes—and so have I.

III

Have you met the Devil's horns,
When you named him, much too nigh;
Have you trod on people's corns?
Yes—and so have I.

IV

Have you seen a rogue turn saint,
Some that pass for saints look sly,
Bones reflesh'd with paste and paint?
Yes—and so have I.

V

Have you heard the Syrens sing,
Have you laugh'd when you should cry,
Have you found some pleasures sting?
Yes—and so have I.

VI

Have you seen some hopes you cherish'd
With the short-lived roses vie,
Fairest, sweetest, soonest perish'd?
Yes—and so have I.

VII

Have you waited by a stream
Till the channel should be dry,
And pursued a vapour's gleam?
Yes—and so have I.

VIII

Have you tried to climb Fame's steep,
Have you found some things too high,
Have you found some themes too deep?
Yes—and so have I.

IX

Have you seen that who does right
Need not fear a frowning sky,
Need not mind the world's despite?
Yes—and so have I.

X

Have you ever found a friend
On whose faith you could rely,
Like the oak no storm can bend?
Yes—and so have I.

XI

Have you found some tender breast
To return and soothe your sigh—
A true mate to share your nest?
Yes—and so have I.

XII

Lastly, as the preacher saith,

Have you thought that you must die,

And of what comes after death?

Yes—and so have I.

THE RESPONSE OF EARTH TO HEAV

'Glory to God on high!'
Peal'd in the starry sky;
In softer accents then,
While gleam'd the eternal fires
Sang the angelic choirs
'Peace, and goodwill to men

And this the answer given
By the dark Earth to Heaven,
'To arms! to arms! to arms!'
Nor was it long deferr'd,
And still each morn are heard
The trumpet's shrill alarms.

And to a merry tune
As in a gay saloon,
Men lightly step to death;
Some bound o'er yawning waves,
Some march to grassy graves,
And sing with their last breath.

But when the cannon booms
The ravens shake their plumes,
The ghoul-like vultures scream;
And soon the crashing bones,
The mortal shrieks and groans
Dispel the soldier's dream.

Yet still the nations fight,
Heedless of wrong or right,
Willing, or blindly driven;
Blood saturates the plain,
Blood dyes the azure main,
And almost sprinkles Heaven.

'Glory to God on high!'
Resounds the starry sky,
'Peace on the earth!' but when?
Not till the world grows wise,
And all the people rise
And say Amen! Amen!

THE HYMN OF CLEANTHES.

TO JOVE.

Most glorious of the immortal, many-named,
Ever almighty Jove! Nature's first cause,
And who by law dost govern all things, hail!
For meet it is that mortals worship Thee,
Since we Thy offspring are, of all who live
And move upon the earth, alone endow'd
With speech symphonious. Therefore unto Thee
I will sing praise and ever chant Thy power.
At Thy command revolves the Universe
Obedient, and rejoices in Thy sway.
Thou hold'st in Thy unconquerable grasp
The two-edged, fiery, ever-living lightning,
Beneath whose bolt Nature's whole fabric shudders:

And by its force Thou dost control the scheme
Which through all things extendeth, passing from
The greater lights, and mingling with the less.
Such Thy dominion, King of All Supreme!

* * * * * *

Naught without Thee is done on Earth, O Spirit!
At Heaven's ethereal height, or in the Sea,
Save what the wicked in their folly work.
But thou know'st how the uneven to adjust,
Order to bring from chaos, and dost make
The unlovely fair. For so hast Thou combined
All things in unison, blending good with evil,
That there is one eternal law for all,
Which the perverse avoid or overlook.

Ill-fated they for bliss who ever yearn,
Yet heed not God's all-comprehensive law,
And see not that by wisely following it
They might enjoy good lives! Instead whereof,

Reckless they after diverse objects strive;
Some with unhallow'd eagerness for glory;
Many unscrupulous intent on gain;
Others in ease and luxury indulge,
Or pleasures gross; but all alike soon find
The effects quite contrary to their desires.

But Thou, all-bounteous Jove! in clouds enwrapt
Wielding the lightning, O deliver man
From darksome ignorance, and scatter it,
O Father! from our souls; and grant that we
May gain the wisdom in which trusting Thou
With equal justice rulest over all;
That by Thy favour honour'd, we to Thee
May render honour, and of all Thy works,
As beseems mortals, sing perpetual praise:
Since there is not for men or Powers Divine
A greater privilege than in right accord
To hymn the reign of everlasting Law.

SERENE NIGHT.

(From the Spanish of Luis de Leon)

WHEN I behold the heaven
With orbs of light innumerable adorn'd,
And look toward the earth
Enshrouded by the night,
Buried in slumber and oblivion;

Affection then and grief
Awaken in my breast an ardent pang,
Mine eyes a fountain made
Shed streams of bitter tears,
And with a dolorous voice at last I say:—

Abode supreme of grandeur,
Temple of brightness and of loveliness,
The soul which for thy courts
Was born, Oh! what mischance
Keeps it in this low prison-house obscure?

What mortal aberration
Far separates from the truth the sentient mind,
That it should thus forget
And lose thy bliss Divine,
And follow a vain shadow, bliss unreal?

Man is given up to sleep
And dreams insensate, heedless of his fate,
While with secret pace
The swift rotating heaven
Takes from him the few hours to live assign'd.

Oh! mortals, awake!
Attentive look, and see what ye are losing!
The immortal spirits,
For joys transcendent form'd,
Can they on shadows and illusions live?

Ay! elevate your gaze
To yon celestial everlasting sphere,
And ye will deride the follies
Of this fallacious life,
With all it fears and all for which it hopes.

What more than a brief point
Is this degraded torpid world, compared
With that grand scene sublime,
Where better'd evermore
Is that which is, which will be, which has pass'd?

Who the great concert sees
Of those eternal splendours in the skies,
Their movements always sure,
Their paces, if unequal,
Yet in proportion justly harmonised:

The moon as she proceeds
Around her silvery orbit; after her
The light whence knowledge flows;
And then the gracious star
Of love that follows, bright and beautiful:

And how another course
Holds on ensanguined and vindictive Mars,
And Jupiter benign,
Compass'd with thousand blessings,
Calmeth the heaven with his belovèd beam:

Higher afar revolves
Saturn, the father of the golden ages,
And beyond him the throng
Of the reluctent choir
Ceaseless imparts its radiance and its treasure :

Who is there that sees this,
And estimates the meanness of the earth,
And does not groan and sigh,
And break through that which bars
And from these pleasures banishes the soul ?

Here lives content, and peace
Perpetual reigns, and 'stablish'd here
On rich and lofty throne
Continues sacred love,
For aye with glories and delights surrounded.

Infinite beauty here
Displays itself, and here resplendent shines
The light most clear and pure
That never turns to night,
And in this clime doth spring eternal bloom.

O veritable fields!
O meads in truth for ever fresh and fair!
Mines of exhaustless wealth!
O bays felicitous!
Vallies with never-failing plenty stored!

NOTES.

NOTES.

THE CHANTRY OWL.

PART 1, v. 2.

HUMBOLDT, in his Views of Nature, when describing the rocks of the Cataracts of Orinoco, where the brave tribe of the Atures perished with their language, says, 'There still lives, and it is a singular fact, an old parrot in Maypures which cannot be understood, because, as the natives assert, it speaks the language of the Atures.'

The author has known several parrots of venerable age, but as to the years which owls attain when allowed the rare privilege of living the full term assigned to them by Nature, he has been unable to procure authentic information. A friend of his is acquainted with a tame owl which, though it has reached its twenty-first year, still looks as fresh and lively as a youth in his teens; and the Rev. Gilbert White of Selborne, whose veracity has never been questioned, says, 'We have had, ever since I can remember, a pair of white owls that constantly breed under the eaves of this church.' He did not disturb them in their sacred domicile, but continued always to regard them as under his charge. Waterton, in whom the owls found their most earnest advocate, tells us much of their ways, but leaves us in doubt

respecting their longevity. Yarrell, speaking of the white or barn owls, gives only the vague statement that, if unmolested, the same haunts are frequented either by parent birds or their offspring for many years in succession.

Naturalists agree that, in the purity and constancy of their connubial relations, owls are models for other bipeds; whilst in their predacious habits they bear favourable comparison with many of their superiors in size and organisation, whether on two legs or four. They are much more efficient destroyers of rats and mice than the favourite quadrupeds for some of which rich spinsters have made large bequests, and erected costly mausoleums. One authority on this subject estimated, from his own observation, that a pair of owls had killed twenty-seven rats and mice in one night. Goldsmith also recognises the useful services which owls render to their contemporaries of the human species. 'In fact,' he says, 'whatever mischief one species of owl may do in the woods, the barn owl makes a sufficient recompense for, by being equally active in destroying mice nearer home; so that a single owl is said to be more serviceable than half-a-dozen cats, in ridding the barn of domestic vermin.' He then quotes from an old writer that 'in the year 1580, at Hallontide, an army of mice so overran the marshes near Southminster, that they eat up the grass to the very roots. But at length a great number of strange painted owls came and devoured all the mice. The like happened again in Essex about sixty years after.'

Ovid and Horace have not treated these public benefactors with the respect to which they are entitled; and Waterton does not fail to remember that 'even Virgil joined in the hue and cry against this much injured family.' Shakespeare is not less unsparing in hard terms, though on one occasion he more *solemnly* calls the male owl 'the fatal bellman.' Gray discourteously applies to the female owl the epithet 'moping.'

Those who would learn what can be said in behalf of these birds, and in extenuation of their minor offences, may refer to 'Waterton's Essays on Natural History,' page 270 of Messrs. Warne & Co's recent edition. His remarks have been published and circulated as a pamphlet by Mr. Belgrave, for the information of farmers and others who so long regarded owls as rural pests.

But returning to the question of the age which owls would reach, if let to live out their days, the result of the writer's enquiries among those who have had opportunities of observing them, is that their natural longevity is considerable, if not equal to that of another often persecuted bird, the raven. The proofs, however, would scarcely have satisfied Sir G. Cornewall Lewis and others of a like sceptical turn of mind, who have even questioned the accuracy of Parish and other accredited records relating to the human race; and, as yet, the births and deaths of birds, and other inferior members of the Earth's family, have not been registered, as possibly will be done hereafter, judging from the anxious supervision recently bestowed by legislators on multifarious and special objects and matters, including birds and beasts of all kinds. An Act passed in the 35th–36th years of the reign of Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria, A.D. 1872, actually protected the '*ignavus bubo*' in pairing time; though it omitted two of the finest British song-birds, the thrush and blackbird; probably in deference to the strong representations of an influential deputation of London Market-Gardeners to the Secretary of State for the Home Department. But by a statute passed in 1880 wild birds are all protected in pairing time, reserving, however, to the owner or occupier of any land, and to any person authorised by him, the power or pleasure of killing even in pairing time such birds as are not mentioned in the schedule to the Act. Unhappily for

thrushes, blackbirds, larks, &c., they are omitted from the schedule.

Many ravens, if we may trust tradition, have been centenarians; and Ovid, as good an authority as some others more relied upon, mentions a raven who was above 900 years old, and who, as Waterton observes, might have been a companion for Methuselah:—

Novem cornicis sæcula passæ.

If that be only half true, an owl might, as described in this discursive fable, have witnessed the suppression of the monasteries, and have survived to be as much surprised at their restoration as are the descendants of the sturdy English and stout Scots of the times of the Tudors, the Stuarts, and the Commonwealth.

But ravens and white owls are becoming rare birds in many parts of the West of England, owing to the prejudice of farmers, and the slaughtering instinct of rustics and shop-boys; and gamekeepers show no mercy to the tawny owls. One of the latter species, which had been domesticated by a friend of the writer, and was occasionally allowed to range a garden and meditate in a loft, was lately despatched by a poaching cordwainer, who could not repress his propensity to handle a gun and kill what was harmless.

The owl is still regarded by not a few with superstitious feelings, which, however, do not deter from wanton cruelty. A post-boy (so called, though he numbered more than threescore years) a few weeks since informed the writer, with evident apprehension, that he and his horses had been equally frightened at night in a lonely lane by the apparition of a large white owl, gifted with a supernatural shriek; and he seemed to regret that he had not strangled the ominous bird with the lash of his whip; though its cry must have been melodious, compared with the 'Waugh O' of the great American owl, which was mistaken by a party of the Scottish Highlanders for the awful voice of a departed Indian.

PART 2, v. 14.

Almost the only creatures besides human beings who acquire a liking for strong fluids and other bad tastes and habits, from coming in contact with civilisation, are monkeys and parrots, which in their voyages across the Atlantic to Europe often receive very improper training, and sometimes, when they reach the Christian latitudes, make rapid progress in the knowledge of evil. But owls, under the same influences, are never debauched; though there is a common saying in the West, that, when a man has imbibed too much of some alcoholic beverage, he is 'as drunk as an owl.' The comparison probably originated in the stupefied, blinking, and unsteady appearance of the bird, if disturbed in his slumbers during the day; or when overtaken by the dawn in his nocturnal rambles. The light greatly affects his eyes, if it does not make him see double. In this predicament, he is often surrounded and teased by the smaller birds, much as a tipsy mortal is by the mischievous urchins of a village.

PART 3, v. 16.

The 'Silent Tower of Bottreau' is the subject of some fine verses included in the Cornish Ballads and other Poems of the late Robert S. Hawker, Vicar of Morwenstow, a new edition of which has been published since his death by Messrs. Kegan Paul & Co. I extract the last verse:—

Still when the storm of Bottreau's waves
Is wakening in his weedy caves,
Those bells, that sullen surges hide,
Peal their deep notes beneath the tide:
'Come to thy God in time!'
Thus saith the ocean chime:
Storm, billow, whirlwind past,
'Come to thy God at last!'

PART 3, v. 20.

The Latin Satires on Monks and Ecclesiastics, attributed to *Walter Mapes*, which so vividly describe the popular temper and

movements in England towards the close of the 12th and during the earlier half of the 13th centuries, were collected and edited by Mr. Wright, and published for the Camden Society in 1841.

The Owl in my fable has been lenient, if not partial, in his allusions to the Monks, and has not been sparing in the epithets he has applied to the King who has found so able a champion in Froude. But if that historian is emphatic in vindication of Henry VIII. and his greater daughter, we are not surprised that Waterton, the friend of owls, a devoted admirer of things ancient, and captivated by what he regarded as 'the fair humanities of old religion,' was as decided in expressing opposite sentiments. In his Catholic fervour he did not hesitate to declare that he would rather run the risk of going I will not quote where, 'with St. Edward the Confessor, Venerable Bede, and St. Thomas of Canterbury, than make a dash at Heaven with Henry VIII., Queen Bess, and Dutch William.'

THRASEA.

In this poem the writer has relied for the facts on the few passages which mention Thrasea in the 13th, 14th, and 16th books of the Annals of Tacitus, introducing some contemporaneous incidents to illustrate the times in which Thrasea lived and suffered.

It is stated that the manuscripts of the latter portion of the Annals have come to us from a single copy, which by some sad accident has lost several leaves, and we have thus been deprived of the closing scenes of Thrasea's life, and of the solemn lesson of his last words.

As respects the character of Nero, Landor, in one of his *Imaginary Conversations*, refers to the malady (insanity) which *blighted* every branch of the Claudian family, and says, 'Nero

in the beginning of his government, and indeed five entire years after, a wise and virtuous prince, was soon affected by the same insanity, acting differently on his heart and intellect.' To this charitable and, probably, sound opinion, may be added what Dean Merivale has said in his History of the Romans under the Empire, when speaking of Tacitus, 'Even if we grant that there is no exaggeration in these hideous pictures, yet we must not allow the most accomplished of painters to disguise the fact that such horrors belong to the age and the class. The barbarities wreaked by Nero and Domitian on the highborn nobles of Rome were but the ordinary precautions of trembling slaveowners whose lives were held from day to day by the tenure of physical repression unrelentingly exercised against their own bondsmen.'

The passage from Cicero, which I have supposed to have been cited by some one present in Thrasea's garden on the evening of his death, will be found in the last section of 'Cato Major,' and is as follows:—'O præclarum diem cùm ad illud divinum animorum concilium cœtumque proficiscar; cùmque ex hâc turbâ et colluvione discedam!'

The edition of Tacitus which I have used is that of Halm, published at Leipsic. In the last and defective section he prints *libamus*, but the English editions give *libemus*. I am unable to ascertain which is correct.

THE HYMN OF CLEANTHES.

In my imperfect rendering of this Hymn, I have been aided by the polished, but somewhat diffuse, translation of Gilbert West, which will be found in vol. 13th of Chalmers' Edition of the English Poets; by the literal translation appended to Professor Newman's Essay 'The Soul: its Sorrows and its Aspirations;' and by a friend at the British Museum, who kindly procured

for me a copy of the original. Of Gilbert West, who died in 1776, the year after the death of his only son, Dr. Johnson speaks 'as one of the few poets to whom the grave might be without its terrors.' In a note to his translation West says that Cleanthes 'wrote many pieces, none of which are come down to us but this hymn and a few fragments, which are printed by H. Stephens in a collection of philosophical poems.' To this collection I have not been able to obtain access; but I should be glad to learn that it can be procured.

It is said that Cleanthes was one of the poets to whom St. Paul referred in the Sermon on Mars Hill: Acts xvii. 28. He was born at Assos in Lydia, about B.C. 300, and, going to Athens, became the disciple of Zeno. To enable him to attend that teacher's lectures in the day, he had to labour for his living by drawing water from the wells during the night for the public gardens. But he had the great gift of a sound mind in a sound body; and he studied so earnestly and thoroughly that he was accepted as the successor of Zeno in the year B.C. 263. After his death, in his 90th year, the Senate of Rome erected a statue in honour of him in his native place where it was seen by Simplicius in the 6th century.

I am informed that the last edition of the remaining writings of Cleanthes is that by Mertzdorf, published at Leipsic in 1835. The hymn is included in Brunck's edition of the 'Gnomici Poetæ Græci,' a copy of which has been sent to me since my translation. Where the asterisks are marked two lines are wanting in the original.

SERENE NIGHT.

The Noche Serena of Luis Ponce de Leon, usually called *Luis de Leon*, has been regarded by competent critics as one

of the finest odes in the Spanish language, and my attempt to translate it will give a very inadequate notion of the original. I have adopted its metre, though I have avoided the difficulties of rhyme in order to be accurate as to meaning, if prosaic. The concluding stanzas have been considered inferior to those which precede; but the entire composition should be read in the language in which it was written, to appreciate its form and melody; and as to the ideas of the enthusiastic monk, his countryman Quintana, who has collected his poems in the 'Parnaso Español,' says in a note that 'the author did not aspire to show himself astronomer or physical philosopher, and perhaps if he had wished he would not have been able to do so, but he is altogether poet.'

In the Histories of Spanish Literature by Bouterwek and Ticknor some particulars of Luis de Leon's life will be found; and among the incidents is his condemnation in the 16th century by the Spanish Inquisition for translating the Canticles, and his imprisonment for that imprudence for the period of five years, during which, as described in one of his letters, he was deprived of all communication with mankind, and not permitted to see the light of day. I give his own words:—'Apartado no solo de la conversacion y compañia de los hombres, sino tambien de la vista, por casi cinque años estuve cercado en una carcel y en tinieblas.' We may infer that, if he was not allowed to see the light of day, or hear the voice of man, he was for the same term prevented from looking at the stars which, like the greater poet of old whose psalms he had translated, he loved to contemplate and consider.

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